

STELLA'S
ADVENTURES
IN
STARLAND
ELBRIDGE H SABIN






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STELLA'S ADVENTURES
IN STARLAND



Stella's Adventures in Starland

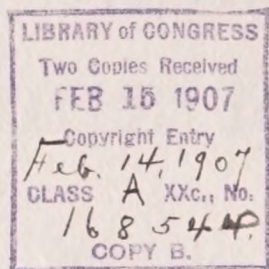
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THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.

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Stella's Adventures

CHAPTER I

AN INVITATION FROM MR. COMET

THIS is not to be a tale about what took place once upon a time, which means long ago. Of what happened then, no one really can be sure. Perhaps there were elves and fairies who danced in the moonlight on the green sward; gnomes who lived in dark caves far down under the ground; giants with a great fondness for tender boys and girls as food; witches who, astride a broomstick, on dark and stormy nights sailed through the air to play all kinds of wicked pranks on sleeping people; and animals who wore clothes, and talked with one another just as you do with your playmates.

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All this is not for me to say. Some people scoff at such things, but who truly knows? Still if there ever were such times, there is no reason to believe that they have ended. The grass on the lawns and in the vales and dells is as soft and velvety as it ever was; the caverns are as dim and gloomy as they could have been in past centuries; there are desert wastes wherein huge giants might roam for ages undiscovered and each day grow hungrier and hungrier; the gales of summer and the blasts of winter still howl through the trees and roar around the eaves and down the chimneys, with din and clatter enough to arouse any witch from her slumbers; and who has not owned a dog, horse, or cat whose eyes plainly showed that he could speak if he only dared, and who would not have surprised one much had he asked for the latest style of cap or coat?

So, while this story is to be of a strange

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journey made by a little girl friend of mine, and has nothing at all to do with elves, fairies, gnomes, giants, witches or even with earthly animals, you must not understand me as doubting what others have written. And if the weird tales of bygone years, which you with wide-open eyes read before the winter fireside, in fact are true, there is all the more reason to believe that the trip which my chum says she made to starland the other night, and of which you are now to hear, is true also. She went alone, so all I can vouch for is that the events are given to you just as she told them to me.

Before hearing of what she did, you will want to know something about the girl herself. Her name is Stella. That means star, as those of you who study Latin are aware. But you must not think of her as one of those star-eyed damsels described in fairy stories, with hair like burnished gold, lips red as

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cherries, ears like pink sea-shells, cheeks blushing like the damask rose, and hands white and slender as the lily.

Far from it. To me she seems indeed very beautiful, but love beautifies every one and all things. As a matter of fact, Stella is an every-day little girl, like you, or your mate across the street. Her hair is between black and brown, her eyes between brown and black; her cheeks and hands are brown when the sun tans them in summer, and red when the wind kisses them in winter. She is neither tall nor short, neither fat nor slim; just a hearty, healthy, hungry girl, eating, sleeping, studying, working, playing, in a very ordinary way.

In one point only is Stella somewhat peculiar: she has a passionate love for the stars. As a baby, she would cry at night unless her crib was placed close to the window. There, if the sky were clear, she would

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lie for hours, flat on her back, gazing up at the heavens, cooing and crowing, and waving her chubby fists in the air. But if it were cloudy so no stars could be seen, she would be cross and would need constant care.

Each year this love grew stronger. Almost as soon as she could read, she learned the names and location of the different stars, planets and constellations. When alone after dark she would talk to them, ask them questions, and imagine their replies.

Once, when her big brother overheard her doing this, he cried out, "Stop your nonsense," but she only replied, "I can't help it. They seem alive to me and always have. Why, I would not be at all surprised if that big fellow over there near the top of the poplar tree, spoke to me right now. He looks as though he is laughing at us, any way." Then he called her a silly child, and stalked away very grandly, as big brothers

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ofttimes do ; but Stella never has lost faith in her stars.

The house in which this little girl lives is large and airy. It stands on the edge of the town, where there are no other dwellings to hide the view. Around it are acres of well kept lawn with paths winding in and out among rose bushes and shrubbery. There are many trees, too, but all low and well-trimmed so that one always can look over or through them.

The windows are long and deep and wide. They open out on broad porches, which encircle the house on three sides and extend to the second story. There even are little galleries in front of the queer windows in the high mansard roof. At every turn are ideal places to sit and read, or simply to gaze and dream.

Way up on the third story, in an ell at the very northwest corner, is Stella's room.

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Here two huge dormer-windows almost join. From the yard they look like old women in sun bonnets, gossiping with each other. Sitting between them, Stella can see all of the sky and country far off to the west, or to the north. If she places herself exactly facing the corner, she can look in both ways at the same time. There is also a little opening towards the east.

Between the dormer-windows is her favorite nook. Often when twilight comes, here she will loll in her big, leather-covered arm-chair and greet her star friends as they appear one by one. Best of all, it seems to her, it is to curl up here at night, when all else have gone to bed. Then there is no one to disturb her thoughts, no sound to break the stillness. As she sits this way, all alone, staring dreamily at the sky, is it any wonder that the very quiet of the stars seems to steal into her soul, and that she sees strange sights and visions?

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We have now come to the point where she starts on the queerest tour ever taken by a little girl, or big girl either, for that matter. I shall try and give you all the facts in detail, precisely as she has told them over and over to me.

On a balmy spring evening Stella was sitting in her arm-chair between the windows in her room. As usual, she faced the corner so that without trouble she could look forth, now to the north and now to the west. It had been a difficult day at school and she was tired. Her head ached a little and she admits that at first she could not think very clearly. But soon her fancy wandered among the stars. To the north, the big dipper swung above the trees. "I wonder," she mused, "who drinks out of it. Perhaps Santa Claus. He must live near the north star, which, like as not, is a big light on the end of the north pole. Or perhaps the man in the moon."



Stella gazing at the Stars

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Then Cassiopeia's Chair invited attention, and somewhat in this wise she continued: "What a grand chair! But I don't really think it is any better than mine. Some way it looks kind of hard and stiff. Wish I could sit in it, though, just for a minute."

Now she turned her head to the west and a cry of amazement escaped from her lips. No wonder! There towards the south, low down in the heavens, slowly cutting his way through the dark blue vault, hung Sirius, the dog-star, a dazzling globe of glistening white. "Oh, isn't he a beauty!" she exclaimed. "And why do people call him a dog-star? Wonder if he honestly is a dog. Would n't I like to pat him on the head, and have him in our backyard instead of that ugly bull-pup Hector. Wish he would bark once so I could hear him." In her excitement she had leaned far forward in her chair, but now she sank back again and for several moments,

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almost breathless, she gazed straight at the dog-star's big white face.

The night was calm and still, and so, after a little while, she slowly closed her eyes.

But Stella did not go to sleep. Mind you, she did not forget herself for one single instant. Of that she is very positive. No doubt she would have slept, but just as she was on the border of dreamland, there came to her ears, gently at first, but ever louder and clearer, a mellow, silvery baying as though some bell-mouthed hound were calling to her from far away in the distance. At first the sound was so regular and rhythmical that it did not disturb her thoughts, but rather mingled with them. Gradually, however, the long-drawn notes became shorter and more emphatic, till at length her ears were bombarded by a series of yelps, sharp and impatient, but still musical.

This was too much for Stella's peace of

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mind. In an instant she was all alert. First, she sat up in her chair and listened. Then, with a bound, she sprang out on the gallery, and leaning over the railing she peered around among the trees and bushes. Surely no dog or other animal was there. Then, as the noise continued, more and more furiously, and now seemed to come from above, she found herself searching the tree-tops, the eaves, and even the roof, but with no success.

Every moment she became more aroused and curious. "There is something somewhere barking at me, and I'm going to find it if it takes all night," she remarked to herself. Then came another great surprise. From somewhere behind her, a shrill, quavering voice called out, "What's the matter with the dog-star? Did n't I hear you, a short time ago, wishing you could hear him bark?"

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Stella turned around with a start. "I beg your pardon," she said, for she is a very well brought-up child, "I did not know any one was here." Imagine her astonishment when she found herself addressing the empty air. The voice seemed to have come from nowhere, just as did the baying and the yelping.

Now she began to be frightened, and, though she denies it, I myself think that she would have run scampering through the hall and called her big brother, had not the odd appearance of the northern sky diverted her. Close to Cassiopeia's Chair, there appeared a yellow blotch, as though some giant hand had thrown a big bunch of golden rod up against the blue vault.

Even as my little friend gazed, this mass began to assume shape and form. Two straggling fragments at the bottom developed into a pair of slender, though shapely legs. Two fluttering streamers at the top fell down



A Wonderful Man appears in the Sky

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along the sides and became very presentable arms and hands. Then a round body easily could be descried, and perched on top of it, a chubby head that clearly must belong to a very jolly gentleman indeed. The eyes were a bright, cherry red, like bits of iron the smith hammers on his anvil; and the lips were full and puckering, as though naturally inclined to smiles.

Stella, though greatly startled, at once felt attracted by this wonderful man, but being well-bred, she waited for him to speak first. It was not long. Suddenly he raised his arms over his head, straightened up to his full height, and yelled down to her in that same quavering voice, "What's the matter with the dog-star?" Then she, not to be outdone, stood up on tip-toe, threw her arms above her, and in her childish treble, answered, "He's all right!"

Quickly the man bent forward till his

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hands rested on his knees. He shook his head fiercely, and fairly roared, "Who's all right?" while Stella, entering fully into the spirit of the game, shouted back at the top of her voice, "The dog-star!"

At this the old gentleman seemed vastly tickled. His eyes rolled and tumbled and his whole frame quivered with laughter. As soon as he could control himself, which he seemed to do with difficulty, he made Stella a most courtly bow, and addressed her politely: "And you are all right, too, I reckon. You see, I've been watching you night after night and feel quite well acquainted with you. I was listening when you wished you could hear the dog-star bark, and then, when you didn't know what all that yelping was, I thought I'd give you a pointer. It's that pesky dog-star, that's what it is, and if I could reach a club, I'd make him stop his racket mighty quick."

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By this time Stella's fear and amazement all had vanished. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that she should be standing leaning over the gallery-railing and conversing with this funny blond gentleman up in the air.

As he seemed to be waiting for her to say something, she remarked very respectfully, "I hope you do not mind my asking, but really I'd like to have you tell me your name."

"Comet," he replied; "Mr. Comet. Those rude little Asteroid boys call me 'Commy,' but I don't like it, and if they keep it up much longer I'll have them arrested. Don't you know a comet when you see one?"

"Why," answered Stella, "I thought comets spent all their time scooting around in the sky, millions and millions of miles a minute. You're standing stock-still."

"To be sure I am," said Mr. Comet. "It's

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a nice life we lead, all the time revolving in an orbit, with never a chance to rest. I'm sick of it. How would you like it if some one should put you out on the fair grounds and make you run round and round the race track for ever and ever? ”

Stella had to confess that she would not enjoy it at all.

“Exactly,” continued the Comet. “Now I have been abused long enough, and not another move do I make till I get my rights.” Here he stamped his foot on the sky, closed his lips tight together, folded his arms, and looked very decided indeed.

“What are your rights?” asked Stella. “You talk as though you had lots of troubles.”

“Troubles?” shouted Mr. Comet, becoming somewhat stirred up, “I should say I do have plenty of them. In the first place, I get very hot and thirsty, especially on sul-

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try summer nights, exercising all the time, and there is not a single thing fit to drink out of. Look at the Little Dipper, and the Big Dipper, too, will you? No bottom in them at all. I would not mind a hole in the bottom, because I could plug that up with my finger, or with the combings out of my tail; but when the bottom is all hole, then I draw the line. It's a nuisance, that's what it is. I'm getting a little stiff in the joints and when I try to bend over and lap out of the Milky Way, the stuff runs up my nose and into my eyes; it makes my beard all soggy and covers my waistcoat with grease spots. I'll not stand it any longer. Do you know of a single dipper, cup, pot, kettle, pan, bottle, or even a tub, with a bottom in it, in the whole heavens?"

Stella was sorry, but she could not remember anything of the kind.

"Well," Mr. Comet went on, "I thought

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so. Then there is nothing fit for a man of my years to drink. I've been quenching my thirst from the Milky Way till I'm tired of it. Milk was all right when I was a baby, and I did n't mind it much when I was a young man; but for an old man, thousands and thousands of years old, I say it's too weak a diet. Tea, now, might do, or coffee perhaps, just to brace me up when I'm tired. Say," and here Mr. Comet leaned over and whispered very confidentially, "you have n't happened to learn, in school, about something good to drink anywhere up here, have you?"

Stella regretted that she had not.

"That settles it," replied Mr. Comet. "Here I stay, and I'll not set foot in my orbit again for anybody until I'm given an eight-hour night, with the rest of the time for play, something invigorating to drink, and something with a bottom in it to drink out of. Now I see Cassiopeia has gone gadding

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around somewhere, and I think I'll take a nap in her chair. I'm all tired out." So saying, he sat down, crossed his legs, folded his arms, tipped back his head, closed his eyes, and in less time than it takes to tell it, seemed sound asleep.

Stella wondered what she should do next, but before she had made up her mind the Comet woke up long enough to say, "I don't intend to sleep more than an hour or so. Then, as it's my night off, I'm going to run around and call on my friends. There's Lady Venus; Mars, who's always looking for a scrap; Neptune, who once lived in the ocean; old Mr. Moon, who's in poor health and somewhat cross; Mrs. Sun, his wife, who's as jolly as can be; and a whole lot of them. No end of fun. Better come up and go with us. It's easy. Just walk right along the sky same as I do. Can't slip if you try. Come ahead!

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You've read about Jupiter's belt and Saturn's rings. I'll show them to you." And Mr. Comet was fast asleep again.

Stella hesitated. Was it right for her to stray so far from home, at least without asking her father and mother? and she knew they would say "No." While she pondered, again she heard the silvery baying of the dog-star, but this time she detected a note of welcome and encouragement. That decided her. "I'll do it!" she cried. "No one ought to care, and I may never get such a chance again."

Just as she was about to start there came to her ears from the north another sound, which at first she took for an empty farmer's wagon rumbling over the high wooden bridge across the creek.

"Now I shall always know what it is when folks say it thunders at night out of a clear sky," she chuckled. "It is Mr. Comet snoring."

CHAPTER II

A TRIP TO THE SKY

STELLA at once made ready for her journey. Not much preparation was necessary. Already she was fully dressed, just as on her return from school. Her kid shoes, however, were changed for a stouter and thicker pair, with heavier soles, because, as she said to herself, while the sky looked perfectly dry and smooth, it might be damp, and perhaps in places rough and splintery. Over her shoulders she threw a light blue shawl, and with a final glance about the room to see that there was nothing else she wanted, she gently opened the door and softly stepped out.

Quietly she stole along the hall; past the half open door of the nursery, where

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slept her little brother; past the rooms of Marie, the maid, and of Jack, who had laughed when he had heard her talking to the stars; down the back stairs, and out through the door.

Hector tugged at his chain and gave a whine of welcome, but there was no time to linger. Around the house and across the yard she sped, and into the street, which led straight towards the north. Here for an instant she paused, to glance over head. There, in his chair, sat her new-found friend, still slumbering peacefully.

“He has n’t moved a bit,” said Stella, “but I must hurry and reach him before he wakes up.”

Along the dusty road she scurried, walking up hill, running down hill, looking neither to the right nor to the left, only intent on arriving, as soon as possible, at the place where the land really did seem to run

A TRIP TO THE SKY

up into the sky. But soon her thumping heart and gasping breath warned her that she must go more slowly.

Now she began to look about her. The noisy city had been left behind. Could anything in heaven be fairer or sweeter than this peaceful country side! The air was fragrant with the earthy odor of early spring. The brooks fairly foamed and bubbled in mirth at their escape, at last, from winter's cruel grasp. Among the trees, the night wind kindly kissed the buds bursting on every branch, and along the hedges it whispered of violets abloom on moss-grown banks, or fields of fresh-blown clover soon to come. In the pastures, sleek cattle nipped the sprouting grass, or lying near the barn-yard, placidly chewed the cud, and gazed solemnly at this small wayfarer, trudging so swiftly by. A big gray horse galloped down to the fence and whinnied his welcome; while a tiny

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colt, frightened by her approach, galloped away as fast as his wobbling legs could carry him. Here and there a house dog barked; and once, a stray rooster, thinking dawn was near, else such a dainty child would not be abroad alone, crowed lustily.

All these things and more Stella noted as she passed, but nothing delayed her. What if Mr. Comet should wake, and start out on his trip without her!

At length she reached the crest of a high bluff. In the valley, far below, wound in and out the ribbon of a river, now more than half obscured by circling wreaths of mist. The road dropped straight down this hill to the bank, where there could be dimly seen the entrance to the bridge which spanned the stream.

As she advanced, the fog grew heavier, but easily she kept the way, as though guided by some hidden power. So dense became

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the enveloping clouds that even her hands and feet were concealed from view; but by the hollow sound of the rough planks she knew when she began to cross the bridge.

So on and on she walked, when suddenly she realized that the echoing footfalls had ceased. Instead of boards, there seemed to be under her something soft and yielding, like the velvety carpets in the parlors at home. She appeared to be mounting slowly, too, as one flounders up and over a huge bank of half-packed snow.

At the same time, the whole drift by which she was surrounded clearly was moving, — twisting and swaying, as if impelled by a strong wind, and meanwhile soaring heavenward. The mist was floating and rising, — and carrying Stella with it!

Now she was thoroughly dismayed, but in a moment she exclaimed, “Why, it feels as though the fog is taking me straight up,

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and I'm climbing up on the fog. Soon we'll go bump against the sky, and then perhaps I can step right on to it."

This thought gave her new energy, and her arms and legs waved frantically, as she tried to crawl on top, so that she might see where she was going, and be ready to disembark at the proper moment; but although the double sensation of ascending continued, she was almost discouraged before there came any change in her condition.

Stella tells me that this was the most trying period of her whole adventure. So closely was she wrapped in clouds that she could see nothing, could hear nothing, could feel nothing; but just as she was about to despair of escaping ever, something happened, and very quickly.

With a squeaking, crunching sound, the whole mass came to a stop instantly. Stella found herself rolling over and over, as, with

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absolutely no control of her body, she shot forward, at first violently, and then more and more slowly, till finally, with a gentle jar, her feet thumped against some substance firm and solid. While this had been taking place, the mist had begun to break into eddying wreaths and circles, even as it was when she first saw it from the hill above the river. Looking downward, she detected here and there a patch of blue.

Immediately she dropped on her knees, and with bare hands, explored in all directions. Everywhere she touched a smooth, clean surface, a trifle more yielding than ice or glass, but still quite hard and firm; and the fog, as it slowly vanished, disclosed the fact that in all directions was one vast, blue expanse. With a cry of joy, Stella realized that at length she was on the sky!

Soon joy gave place to fear. If where she thought herself to be, her head must be hang-

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ing in space, or at least sticking straight out, like a fly climbing up the wall. What was to prevent her from falling? To be sure, she was not falling yet, but it occurred to her that any moment she might commence a hurried plunge through the air. Such an idea was enough to frighten any one.

Stella is a very self-possessed little body, however, and while alarmed, she did not cry nor grow hysterical, as some people might have done. On the contrary, she sat down, because it seemed safer than standing, and said to herself that she would not go a step farther till she had reasoned it all out. So she remained for some moments motionless, looking like some graven image on a broad, blue field, while the little wrinkles on her forehead, and her indrawn lips, showed plainly that she was studying harder than she usually did in school.

Presently the cheeriest of smiles lit up

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her face and she clapped her hands together gleefully. "Now I have it," she said, "and I'm every bit as safe here as I am at home. My, but I'm lots better already."

"You see, it's just this way," she continued, still talking to herself. "When I was a mite of a girl in B 5th grade, I used to think how funny the people in China, on the other side of the world, must feel, because they lived upside-down, with their heads dangling in the air, and perhaps having to pin their pigtails on to their coats, so they would not fall straight out below them. Then, when I got into the high school, teacher told us that 'down' is always towards the centre of the earth, and that the boys and girls in China have the ground under them, same as we do."

"Well," she went on, "if on the earth, 'down' is towards the earth's centre, here on the sky, 'down' must be towards the

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sky's centre, way under my feet, and to fall I'd have to fall up, which isn't possible. I'm not at all scared now, and I'm going to find Mr. Comet as fast as ever I can."

While Stella had mused in this way, mist and fog had disappeared. As she arose, what a vision spread out before her! Spell-bound, she stood and gazed; and well she might.

Far over head, the canopy hung inky black, but pierced here, there, and everywhere by arms and streamers of light, flaring, fading, advancing, retreating, as you have seen the head-light on some mighty engine project its glare into the stormy night, and flash unknown signals on the clouds above the city.

Below this ray-pierced vault of jet, all around and above her, was a soft and mellow glow, as that shed by the blood-red moon in harvest time, only whiter, stronger, and also more mysterious, because its source was entirely invisible. From beneath her

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feet, in all directions, stretched the boundless sky, shading from blue to green, from green to blue, as the wavering lights and shadows came and went.

Stella had supposed that the heavens were one vast, flat expanse, all of the same hue; but great had been her mistake. Where she stood seemed to be the centre of a field, or meadow, of the purest azure; but to the right were rolling hills of darkest violet, with, between them, valleys deepening into indigo, and even black. To the left rose jagged bluffs or mountains of purple, whose crests and peaks gleamed with the white of the diamond. One giant point at the very end of the chain burned red as a ruby.

Nor were these various colors sharply defined. One could not say that here ends the turquoise blue and there commences the emerald green, or point out where the violet of the hilltop ceased, and the darkness of

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the valley began. All merged and blended together, gently, gradually, — pleasing to the eye and soothing to the mind.

So, perhaps, upon a summer day, you may have sat entranced, and watched the yellow plains swell into foothills, gray and drab, while they in turn soar into mountains brown and black. Yet who ever marked the dividing line where the first foothill arises, or where the last one gives way to the mountains?

As you may imagine, Stella was so enthralled by what she saw that she lost all track of time and of her desire to find Mr. Comet. For all I know, she might be standing there yet, staring with all her eyes, had not a calling, as of human voices in the distance, brought her to herself again.

Then, for the first time, she noticed near her what seemed to be a well-worn path, leading off towards the hills on the right.

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Along this path a number of bright objects were approaching her rapidly. As they drew closer, she was surprised, and perhaps relieved, to find that they were apparently a lot of boys, brilliantly and fantastically dressed, but still very similar to some of her friends at home.

Forward, on the dead run, came these urchins, laughing, shouting, and carrying on, just as if no school-girl from the earth were inspecting them so carefully. When but a few yards from her, they halted suddenly, grouped together till their shoulders almost touched, and in unison gave this yell, twice repeated:

“Haw! Haw! Haw!
Hi! Hi! Hi!
Asteroid! Asteroid!
S! K!! Y!!!”

The first time through, the three final letters of the yell were pronounced sharply



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and quickly ; but the last time they were prolonged, especially the "Y," which was drawn out like the howl of a wolf.

Evidently satisfied with the impression they had made, the boys now stood quietly, while one, a little larger than the rest, and apparently their captain, stepped forward and touched his cap politely. Stella noted that he, like his companions, was clad neatly though vividly. His cap and his sweater were the brightest red, and so were the stockings which extended from the tops of his low shoes to the bottom of his black knickerbockers.

Frank and open was his face. His sparkling blue eyes looked fearlessly into hers. His cheeks were clean and rosy ; and though a slightly upturned nose gave somewhat of a mischievous cast to his countenance, all in all he seemed a wholesome, decent lad, and one to be trusted.

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While Stella was jotting down these points he began to speak to her: "Hope we didn't scare you. We're out for a lark, and are having all kinds of fun."

"No, I wasn't scared a bit," Stella answered promptly. "You honestly make me think of some of the crowd at home. But won't you tell me your name? I'm Stella."

"Oh, we're the Asteroid boys! Thought you'd guess. Old Commy calls us 'pesky,' but you mustn't believe all he tells you about us. He's such a funny old chap that we can't help teasing him. S'pose we go too far sometimes, but we don't mean to. We just can't help getting into trouble. Last night we tied the little dipper to the dog-star's tail, and you ought to have seen him run. We'll catch it when we get home; but a lickin' doesn't hurt much after it's over."

All this the little Asteroid rattled off as

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fast as he could talk, till he had to stop for breath. Then he went on: "But Commy's all right. No one else better make fun of him while we're around. Why, last Fourth of July, when I most blowed my foot off fooling with a bunch of northern lights, Mr. Comet bandaged me all up, and went clear out of his way to carry me home. Right good of him, I say. We won't forget it, will we, boys?" And his comrades shouted, "No!" very emphatically.

"That's a good spirit," thought Stella; "perhaps these boys can direct me where I want to go." Then aloud, "I wonder if you won't be kind enough to help me. I want to find Mr. Comet, and haven't the slightest notion where he is."

"That's just what we're here for," replied the spokesman. "We heard him invite you up, and then never tell you the way; so we looked around for you, and if you'll

A TRIP TO THE SKY

come with us, we'll take you to him in a jiffy."

"That's clever of you," said Stella; "and please let's start at once. I'm so afraid he will wake up and wander off before I can get to him."

Upon hearing this the leader turned and spoke a few words to the others. Then they all commenced to move along the path towards the hills, and Stella followed just behind them. At first the Asteroids proceeded in an orderly manner, but soon their good spirits seemed to get the better of them again. She never knew how it began, but one gave a push, another a shove; a third snatched a cap, and ran; a fourth chased him; soon all were running, dancing, screaming, playing leap-frog, and cutting up all kinds of pranks and capers, — but still, in a general way, keeping the road.

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Their queer antics made Stella laugh till the tears came, but she went on as fast as she could walk, and the distance between herself and her fellow-travellers remained always about the same.

After a while they came to the edge of a deep vale, into which the footpath sank abruptly. All below was darkness, and Stella hesitated. Seeing this, one of her guides called back, "Don't be afraid. There's nothing to hurt you. Just watch our red caps. They'll shine all right, and you can't get lost."

Stella then plucked up courage, and half walking, half sliding, plunged into the gloom. After all, it was not as bad as might be imagined. Merrily the caps, glowing as though red hot, danced on ahead of her. She was reminded of one cloudy night when she had chased fireflies out on the lawn at home.

A TRIP TO THE SKY

Soon she was at the bottom, and as the valley was not wide, almost before she knew it she was struggling up the steep trail on the other side. Every now and then she had to halt to catch her breath, but the ringing shouts and gleaming caps of the Asteroids coaxed her on. Before long she could see them, sharply outlined, on the rim above her. With a final dash, she herself reached the top, and stood, breathless, among them. For a few moments they kindly waited for her to recover fully; then again they hastened on ahead, and again Stella followed as fast as possible.

So the strange procession took its way, winding in and out among hills and ridges, till Stella could not help thinking that perhaps her pilots were playing a trick on her. This did them injustice, however, for now, without warning, the path made an abrupt turn to the right, around a projecting ledge;

STELLA'S ADVENTURES

with echoing cries the Asteroids scattered in all directions; and — wonder of wonders — there right before her, in all the glory of Cassiopeia's silvery chair, sat Mr. Comet, still fast asleep!

CHAPTER III

MR. MARS TALKS ABOUT FOOTBALL

ONE would suppose that by this time Stella would have been tired out and ready for a nap herself; but such was not the case. She claims that she was as wide awake as ever in her life, and not at all worn or sleepy. The air was pure and exhilarating; every breath made her eyes sparkle, her cheeks glow, and her nerves tingle. Instead of being weary from her jaunt, she was perfectly fresh and ready for new adventures.

Mr. Comet, it seemed, had changed his position from what it was when, from the corner of her yard, Stella last had looked at him. His legs, instead of being crossed, were sprawled out in front of him; his arms,

STELLA'S ADVENTURES

no longer folded, swung limply on each side of the chair; and to tell the truth, his mouth was spread wide open, in a manner not at all becoming. At first glance she was disappointed in his general appearance. Then she remembered how exhausted he must have been from spinning constantly round and round in his orbit; and she recalled the many cares and trials he had to worry him.

“Poor old man,” she said; “no wonder he is all tuckered out. “I’ll not wake him, but watch here, still as a mouse, till his sleep is over.”

Nor did she have long to wait. Already Mr. Comet began to show signs of restlessness. With a jerk he drew one of his feet close to the chair; with a flop he threw one of his arms across his lap; and his head he turned to one side, as though seeking a softer spot. Finally, with a sigh, he sat up,

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yawned prodigiously, rubbed his eyes, and then blinked and stared around, as if he could not tell where he was. Soon he recognized Stella, and immediately his face brightened. She seemed to remind him of what had taken place.

“Well,” he remarked, with a smile, “for a minute I could n’t place myself. It’s been many a long year since I have had a chance to doze in such a comfortable chair. So you’ve come to see old man Comet and the stars, have you? That’s right; and you’re indeed welcome. Now you must excuse me,” he added, “while I make my toilet. Luckily, there is Aquarius, the water-bearer, off towards the south. Right in time for my evening tub.” He clapped his hands together as one summons a servant.



Stella was so turned around that she was not sure just which way was south; but,

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looking in the direction indicated by Mr. Comet, she beheld approaching them a man scantily clad, with bare head and feet. His left arm was extended in front of him, and under his right was a jar, from which water poured in an endless stream.

As he drew near, Mr. Comet called out, "Wasteful, as usual, Aquarius. Why don't you hold that jar right-side-up?"

"What is the use?" answered Aquarius, in a monotonous, drawling voice, each word being pronounced distinctly. "The water has been spilling out that way ever since I can remember, and yet the receptacle never becomes even partly empty. My burden always is a heavy one."

"We won't quarrel about that," said the Comet. "Every man in the sky, as well as on earth, has his task, I reckon. Now stop a minute, please, while I wash myself a bit."

So saying, Mr. Comet held his hands in

MR. MARS TALKS ABOUT FOOTBALL

the running water, and cleansed them, as well as his face, thoroughly. He then proceeded to dry himself by means of a large silk handkerchief, which he produced from some place about his person, while Aquarius—his urn, if anything, more tilted than ever—mechanically plodded away. Stella was touched by the doleful words and woeful appearance of the water-bearer, and longed to help him; but there was nothing she could do, and soon he was lost to view.

Now while Mr. Comet continued to make himself tidy, she had an opportunity to observe him carefully. From his heels to his head she examined minutely. He turned out to be a well-dressed old gentleman, very different from the way he looked when stretched out, at rest, in the chair. His feet were encased in a pair of tan shoes, somewhat heavy, to withstand continuous walking, but neat and stylish. Black silk hose,

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of finest texture, without crease or wrinkle, disappeared under bright yellow knee-breeches, each clasped with a polished silver buckle. A low-cut waistcoat of spotless white encircled his somewhat portly body, and over this was worn a magnificent long-tailed coat, of the same shade of glaring yellow as his breeches. His shirt front, snowy white, was almost concealed by a long, though well-trimmed beard.

His face seemed attractive, though somewhat comical. The chin was almost double, the mouth a trifle large, the nose a little upturned, the ears a little outstanding, eyebrows a reddish brown, and, to cap the climax, the top of his head was so smooth and bald that it was actually luminous.

After Mr. Comet had arranged his attire to suit him, he reached under the chair and extracted therefrom a tall, white, beaver hat, which he commenced to rub and smooth

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with his handkerchief. While doing this, he became aware that Stella was gazing at him curiously.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“If it won’t hurt your feelings,” Stella replied, “I’m trying to make out where your tail is. My books say all comets have tails.”

“To be sure,” said Mr. Comet. “But you don’t suppose I let mine lie around loose when I’m not using it, do you? Why, if I left it spread out on the sky when I went to bed it would be ruined in no time. Those pesky Asteroids would play crack the whip over it; the dog-star would chew holes in it; Aquarius would splash water on it, and I don’t know what would n’t happen. It would be a sight to behold, that’s what it would. So when not in need of it, I coil it up tight under the tails of my coat. But if you really want to see it,” he continued, “here it is.”

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With this he stood up very straight, pressed his hands against his sides, and — lo, and behold! Slowly at first, and then more and more rapidly, with a whirring sound, there shot out behind him yard after yard of fluffy, flimsy stuff, which rolled and waved along the sky in a shimmering, lustrous, billowy mass, as of finest strands of molten gold.

A cry of sheer delight issued from Stella's lips. This seemed to please the Comet.

“What do you think of that?” he queried.

“Oh, I can't find words to express it!” was all Stella could exclaim. “I never saw anything like it!”

Mr. Comet beamed his satisfaction. “A very fair sort of tail,” he observed; “a very fair sort of tail. Now, listen while I tell you something that you may want to remember. A Comet's tail is a sure sign of his standing and breeding. Whenever you



Mr. Comet shows his Tail

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see one with a mussy, kinky, skimpy tail, you can set him down as not worthy your acquaintance. An appendage such as mine"—here he glanced behind him complacently—"is worn by only a few in the sky."

For some time Mr. Comet stood, as though deep in thought, or perhaps engaged in the contemplation of the glories of his person. Then he remarked abruptly, "Enough of this. You'll begin to consider me stuck up. I was only dreaming of by-gone years. I'm getting to be an old, old man, and that tail is about all I have left. It has taken no little care to keep it in such perfect condition all these centuries, but it is well worth it. Now let's get ready to start."

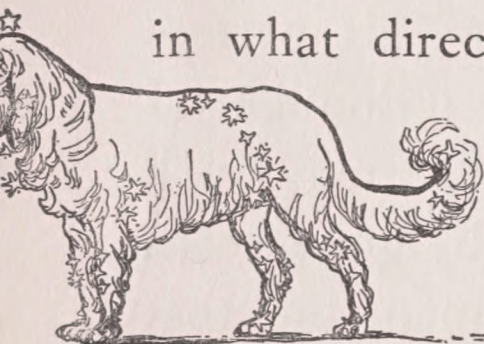
With a clickety, click-click, as you have wound a tape-measure up in its round case, he recoiled his precious burden, and hid it again under his coat.

"That is the most particular part of the

STELLA'S ADVENTURES

whole job," he explained. "I have to exercise the greatest caution, or it will get knotted and snarled. It ought to run back and forth in layers, smoothly and evenly, as thread is wound on a spool. I have it all right now, I guess."

There seemed to be nothing else to be done, and Stella was wondering when and in what direction they were to go. All at



once she heard a whining, and felt something licking her hand.

Jumping nimbly to one side, she looked down, and there

beheld the biggest, whitest, most graceful dog on which she had ever set her eyes.

"Well, if there is n't the dog-star!" cried Mr. Comet. "I rather thought he would come over to play with you. Have you any animals like that in your neighborhood?"

Stella did not answer, for she was too surprised to talk. Such an immense, magnificent beast she never before had seen. His

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legs were lengthy, as those of the greyhound, though much thicker; his body resembled that of a mastiff, but the tail was heavily fringed, as is a setter's. Between the ears, large and flopping as those of a spaniel, the head was somewhat broad; the muzzle was slim and tapering; the lips, hanging down below the jaws, spoke of the bloodhound. The one thing, however, that most fascinated Stella, was his wonderful coat of hair. This was long, smooth, and silky; and of such a glistening, dazzling white, that she almost shielded her eyes as she gazed at him.

While the dog-star had been undergoing this inspection, he had stood quite still. His tail wagged slowly from side to side, and occasionally he gave vent to a little whine of impatience. Now he sprang towards her, and playfully tried to place his front paws on her shoulders. In alarm, she ran to Mr. Comet for protection.

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“Get down, sir!” called Mr. Comet. “Don’t you know better than to bother a girl that way till she is better acquainted with you? Shame on you!” Whereat the dog-star retreated, and sat on his haunches contritely.

Stella soon grew braver, and, walking over, patted him on the head.

“That’s right,” said Mr. Comet. “He isn’t the least bit dangerous. Just talk to him as you would to any other star. He can’t speak himself, but he understands every word you utter. Don’t you remember that he overheard you, in your room, wishing he would bark, and then he howled to please you? If it had n’t been for him, you would n’t be up here at all.”

“I believe I’m going to be fond of him,” Stella remarked. “But where did he get such a mournful expression? He looks as if his heart were broken; or perhaps he is

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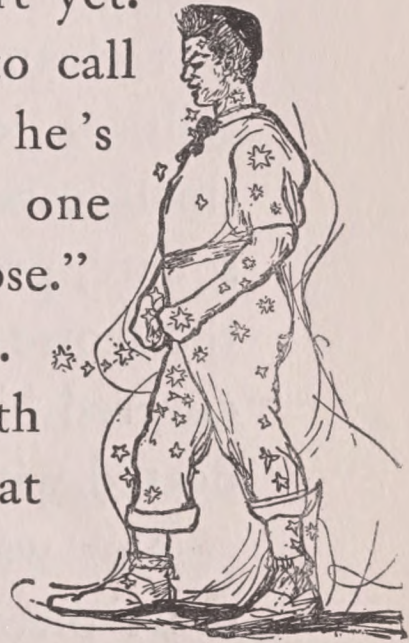
brooding over some wrong. What's his name?"

"Sirius," replied the Comet. "Every schoolgirl ought to know that; and as to his being solemn, you would n't have a *serious* dog grinning, would you?"

"Can't we take him with us?" Stella asked.

"Of course we can," was the answer; "but I don't believe we shall start yet. Mars is the first person I intend to call on, and, if I'm not mistaken, he's coming this way now. Out for one of his cross-country runs, I suppose."

This proved to be the case. Stella observed the new arrival with great curiosity. Along he came, at a jog-trot. While he might be out for exercise, he certainly was making a business of it. His head was thrown back, his chest arched out in front



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of him, and his arms, crooked at the elbows, swung back and forth mechanically. Every motion was as regular as though planned beforehand.

In comparison with Mr. Comet, Mr. Mars presented a slovenly and unattractive appearance. On the back of his bullet-shaped head perched a little soiled cap, in front of which his close-cropped hair—a brick red—stood straight up, pompadour fashion. His face was clean shaven, and displayed all the details of low, retreating forehead, flat nose, small ears, wide mouth, with thick lips, and square, protruding chin. His garments were the worse for wear. A faded scarlet sweater covered his body, and his black trousers were dotted with spots and stains.

Nor was his method of introduction any more pleasing. When he sighted Mr. Comet and Stella, he halted suddenly, thrust one foot far out in advance of the other, assumed

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a half crouching position, and with gruff voice called out: "I'm Mars, the champion. Throw down your hat, take off your coat, and I'll fight a few rounds with you."

"You are mistaken," responded Mr. Comet. Stella noted that he was on his dignity, and that he used choicer language than when he chatted with her. "I am not desirous of a combat or contest of any kind. Perhaps you do not recognize me. I am Mr. Comet, and this" — pointing to his little companion — "is my friend, Miss Stella, from the earth. We were about to pay you a visit, when we saw you approaching."

"So you are Mr. Comet," said Mars, shading his eyes with his hand. "My arms are stronger than ever, but my eyes bother me some at long range. Of course you don't dare to fight me. I'm a fighter myself, but I don't expect every one to follow the same line. Every star to his trade; that's my motto."

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Mars made a motion as though to resume his run, when a new thought seemed to occur to him. Turning to Stella, he inquired, "If you object to fighting, as I suppose most girls do, why were you watching that one out back of the school-house last fall?"

"I did n't watch any fight," replied Stella, somewhat puzzled.

"Don't deny it; I saw you there," insisted Mars.

"But I was n't near any fight," rejoined Stella, decidedly. "You must be mistaken. We play games on the field back of school."

"Mistaken!" cried Mars. "Not much! I saw you and a lot of other girls, plainly, with these two eyes. It was n't any game; though it was n't like any fight I have seen before, either. The biggest, roughest, meanest, most dangerous slugging match I ever looked at — that's what it was. And I've

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been at many a bout. Seemed to be ten or eleven men on a side to start with, but after they got warmed up, there were no sides.

“There was a referee, — a short, fat man in a sweater, — who pulled them apart in the clinches; and a time-keeper, — a tall, slim fellow in a black jersey, who blew his whistle at the end of every round. How they did go it! Don't you have any rules down your way? I wouldn't object to taking on two or three men at a time, but not twenty or more — and each one scrapping all the rest. They hammered and pounded and mauled each other; they rolled and tumbled and wrestled; they bit, hit, kicked, gouged, and pulled hair: and you call that ‘play’!”

“But you don't understand,” cried Stella. “That was only a football —”

“Don't understand!” interrupted Mars, his red hair bristling with indignation. “I

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do understand. That's just the trouble; and you were there, yelling with pleasure. I saw you and heard you.

"Now let me tell you the worst," he continued. "Near the end of the last round one little chap got tired and afraid. I don't like to see a fellow run, but it's wise when he's under-weight, out-classed, and twenty big boys all trying to beat him. So this tiny lad cut for the gate, clear across on the other side of the ring. All the others chased after him. Just as I thought he was getting off, he fell, right between two posts; then they all jumped on him and piled up on him, high as a barn. When they got up, there he lay, limp and white."

Mr. Mars paused. "Poor little boy!" he whispered, a note of tenderness in his voice. "Did he die?" Then, sternly; "And you stood up and yelled with delight, waving a stick with long yellow ribbons on it. I'm

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ashamed of you. Am I not right, Mr. Comet? ”

“ You certainly describe a terrible struggle, which I myself partially witnessed,” replied he ; “ but from this distance I do not wish to pronounce on the right or the wrong of it.”

“ Oh, dear ! ” cried Stella. “ Won’t you both let me explain ? It was the football game between our school and South High. There was no harm in it at all. Last year they beat us, and this time we just had to get even. Towards the end of the last half, with three minutes more to play, the score was six to five in their favor. Then little ‘ Sandy,’ our quarter-back, who weighs less than a hundred, grabbed the ball on a fumble on our ten-yard line and sprinted clear across the field for a touchdown. Of course they fell on him some, and he had a rib hurt ; but he won for us, and he’d have been

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happy if they 'd killed him. Did n't I shout, though! I feel like it right now."

Stella's face shone with her enthusiasm; but Mr. Comet only nodded his head thoughtfully. Mr. Mars still seemed unconvinced.

"You may call it playing," said he, "but that does n't make it playing. A thing's what it is, not what it's called. But I'll not lay it up against you; and I must be going. I'm looking for Jupiter;" and off he trotted.

Here Stella commenced to feel a little queer. Both Mr. Comet and Mr. Mars acted as though they were not entirely in sympathy with her; and talking of the football game had reminded her of home, which now seemed so far away.

Mr. Comet, perceiving this, patted her head, and said kindly, "What's the matter, little girl? Not homesick already?"

"Not exactly homesick," said Stella; "but

MR. MARS TALKS ABOUT FOOTBALL

I was thinking of father and mother, and wondering if anything would happen to them while I'm gone."

"Never fear, my child," Mr. Comet murmured softly; "on earth things may take place which you do not understand, but no real harm comes to any deserving home while God's twinkling stars watch over it."

Something in his face and voice, as well as in his words, cheered Stella; again she felt happy and secure.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOWMAN AND THE HALF-BULL

MR. COMET now carefully placed upon his head the tall, white hat which, while talking with Mars, he had carried in his hand. Then he motioned to Stella, and together they walked slowly in the opposite direction from the one Mars had taken. After them sauntered the dog-star, his wrinkled forehead giving him the appearance of some venerable sage who might be pondering questions of vital importance to the welfare of the universe.

For some time they went along in silence. Stella continued to be filled with amazement at the ever-changing glories of the sky. It suited her exactly to be quiet for a while. As seen from the earth, the heavens at night always had made her subdued and dreamy.

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A feeling akin to this came over her now, as she looked up towards the black vault wherein, somewhere, floated the earth, — her home.

Mr. Comet, too, was deep in thought; and the harder he thought, the more rapidly he stepped. As he held Stella's hand grasped firmly in his, she could not fall behind, and the effort to keep up began to be more than she could endure with comfort. Each instant his speed increased, until at last her feet scarcely touched the ground; and Sirius was compelled to change his trot into a long, swinging lope.

"Mercy," thought Stella; "I do believe he thinks he's back in his orbit again! First thing I know he'll be going a million miles a minute, and dragging me along behind him so fast that my clothes will catch fire. If I don't wake him up, I'll soon be just a comet's tail, and that's all."

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Mr. Comet gave an extra tug, and Stella, affrighted, called out shrilly, "Please, sir, don't you know that I'm here, and that you're almost pulling my arm off?"

"Bless me!" cried Mr. Comet, instantly slackening his pace; "I'd forgotten all about you. I was thinking of something else entirely. You must forgive an old man. I'll not let it happen again."

"I know where your thoughts were," said Stella, as they proceeded at a more respectable gait.

"Where?" asked Mr. Comet, with a shamefaced look, like a boy caught whispering in school.

"Scooting around in your orbit again. You forgot you're on a strike."

"No, indeed. I was n't in my orbit at all."

"What was it then? Where were you?"

"I don't think I'd better tell. You'd

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laugh at me, and I'm an old man who hates to have folks poke fun at him."

"Please tell!" persisted Stella. "I'll not tease you the least little bit. Cross my heart!"

"Well, I was playing football! Now grin, if you dare. You see, while I don't know much about it, I've noticed that the boys pick up the ball, and run with it every time they can. I'd just grabbed it, wrapped it up in my tail, and was about to skip across the field, when you spoke. Do you suppose any one on your team ever could catch me? There's nothing up here that can go faster than I can."

Stella could not help being tickled at the idea of a Comet running with the ball, but she did not dare to show it.

"Of course they'd never tackle you. But it's too early for football now. Why don't you come down to our field meet, though?"

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You'd win everything, from the dashes to the mile run."

"And what's a field meet? Anything like a camp-meeting?" inquired Mr. Comet; but before the question could be answered, Stella heard some one calling her name. Turning around, she beheld the Asteroid, swinging his cap, and coming towards them on the run. To her still greater surprise, she also descried, some distance behind him, Aquarius, making every effort to move quickly, and splashing water around at every jump.

"There's the little boy who showed me where you were," said Stella to Mr. Comet, "and Aquarius. Let's wait for them."

Mr. Comet did not seem particularly pleased with the idea of having company; nevertheless he halted, though reluctantly. The dog-star, too, remembered past insults as he recognized the Asteroid, and, growling, crouched near the Comet's feet.

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“Well, what do you want here?” was the somewhat gruff greeting of Mr. Comet.

Now that the Asteroid actually was face to face with the old gentleman of whom he so often had made sport, he evidently was abashed. Without saying a word, he stood twirling his red cap in his hands and stubbing his toes against a crack in the sky.

“Can’t you speak?” continued the Comet. He talked crossly, but Stella observed a twinkling in his kindly eyes. “Here’s Aquarius, anyway. Words usually come out of his mouth as regularly as the water out of his jar. Why are we thus honored?”

The water-bearer seemed too exhausted to answer. He set his urn on its side on the ground, sat down on it, and fanned his face with his big hands, while he breathed heavily, as one who has finished a race.

Finally he slowly gasped, “That young gentleman will be the death of me. He

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said he would carry my jar for me for a year if I could keep up with him until we overtook you. Then he ran off, giggling most impishly; and I have almost killed myself trying, because it would be very consoling to me to have some one perform my labor for even a year."

"Serves you right!" said Mr. Comet. "Do your own work without grumbling. But what brings you back to me so soon?"

"It is very dreary, always plodding around alone, and I am of the opinion that I am entitled to a change. The boy informs me that you and Stella are about to visit some of our neighbors, and it is my purpose to ask your kind permission to accompany you."

"Granted, willingly, if Stella does not object. The more the merrier. But how about that rascal of a boy? Is he dumb?"

"Let him come, too!" cried Stella and Aquarius together.

THE BOWMAN AND THE HALF-BULL

"If you only would!" exclaimed the Asteroid. "I'll be very good, and not play any tricks at all. See, the dog-star has forgiven me for tying that dipper on to him."

True enough; the great animal now was licking the boy's hand, and wagging his long tail in welcome. So Mr. Comet gave in.

"Come ahead, then," he said; "but none of your nonsense, mind you. It's just as well that we should travel together. There's a fierce, white half-bull, Taurus, who ranges hereabouts, and he won't be so apt to attack the five of us. I'm always a little afraid of him myself."

"A white half-bull!" repeated Stella, in a whisper, to the Asteroid. "He means a half-white bull. How funny!"

"I mean a white half-bull, just as I said;" reiterated the Comet, whose hearing evidently had not suffered with his increasing years.

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"Look sharp, now. We're liable to meet him any moment."

So the procession took its way across the sky. Mr. Comet and Aquarius were in the lead; Stella and the Asteroid followed, a little to one side, so as not to step in the stream constantly pouring from the water-bearer's jar; and last came Sirius, solemn as usual.

Stella watched carefully for the bull so curiously described; meanwhile she chatted with her companion.

"Asteroid is such a long name," she remarked. "What's your first one?"

"Asteroid is the first one I ever had, and the last one, too. What do you mean?"

"Don't try to be smart. Stella is my first, and Anstruther my last name. You must have a first name, too. Every one has."

"But I have n't. If I keep having new

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names all the time, I'll forget the first ones,
and use only the last."

"How queer you are! but I sha'n't argue
with you. I'm going to call you Roidy.
What do you think of that?"

"I don't mind; but you've just given it
to me, so it's my last name, instead of my
first."

At this point discussion was cut off by a
loud bellowing, which caused them all to
stop abruptly. Looking to the left, whence
came the noise, Stella, in astonishment, saw
just what the Comet had talked about,—
half of a white bull. On the summit of a
bluff, in bold relief, stood his horns, head,
shoulders, and front legs. The remainder
of him was missing. His nose hung down
till it almost touched his feet, and between
roars, he pawed the sky, and tossed blue
fragments upwards till they would have cov-
ered his back, had he possessed one.

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"Wherever is the rest of him?" cried Stella.

"There's no rest to him," said Mr. Comet.

"Didn't I tell you?"

"But I should think he would bleed to death. Is the torn place sewed up?"

"I am not advised as to that," remarked Aquarius; "but he has been that way ever since I first beheld him."

"Well, he may grow a new hind-half yet," continued Stella. "The boys say if you cut a pollywog in two, it'll grow right out again."

"But a pollywog and a bull are entirely different animals," suggested Roidy, wisely.

During this exchange of opinions the bull's actions had become even more threatening. Perhaps he was angry at the sight of Roidy's red cap and sweater. The entire party were in doubt as to what course it was best to take; even the dog-star barked excitedly. He seemed to want to say that

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he could save them if the bull only had a tail he could grab between his teeth.

While all were looking intently at the half-animal, there was heard from another direction the flopping of gigantic wings and the clattering of galloping hoofs. This came without warning, and in their nervous condition frightened them still more.

In his fresh alarm, the Comet, with a click, click, took a few extra turns in his beloved tail. Later he confided to Stella that he wound it up so close it hurt him; something as when you do your hair up too tight in curl papers, she thought.

This racket heralded the approach of the most marvellous combination of man, beast, and bird Stella ever had imagined. The legs, body, and tail of a horse were surmounted by wings as of an immense eagle. In front, where the neck and head of a horse should be, there grew instead the body,

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arms, and head of a man. With beating hoofs and outspread wings this creature now swooped down on them. In one hand he violently brandished a long bow, while across the back was strung a quiver filled with arrows.

With the mad half-bull on one side, and this wild apparition on the other, Stella began to think there was no chance for escape. Great was her relief when her companions greeted the new-comer with evident friendliness.

“Hello, Sagittarius!” called the Comet. “I’m always glad to see you, and at the present time more so than usual.”

“It gives me pleasure to renew my acquaintance with you,” announced Aquarius; “and you arrive at a very opportune moment.”

“Thanks to both of you!” said Sagittarius, extending a hand to each, and at the



Aquarius and Sagittarius argue about the Bull

THE BOWMAN AND THE HALF-BULL

same time aiming a vicious kick at Sirius, who had ventured too close to his heels.

“What can I do for you?”

“Please save us from that wild bull over there!” cried Stella, interrupting them.

“He’s going to attack us.”

“All right, little girl,” replied Sagittarius, for the first time becoming aware of Taurus, who had ceased his bellowing and was gazing at them reflectively. “I’ll fix him before he knows it. But let me have a turn at that water. I’m thirsty as a horse.”

Sagittarius, bending his head down to the rim of Aquarius’ jar, drank and drank, till Stella became astonished.

“Won’t he ever stop?” she whispered to Roidy.

“Course he will; but he has to fill both stomachs—the man’s and the horse’s. Now, let me ask you something. If you took him

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home to dinner would you give him beef-steak or baled hay?"

Stella did not get a chance to answer this conundrum, for Sagittarius suddenly raised his head and called out to Roidy, "Here, young fellow; dash some of that water over my back, will you?"

Roidy hesitated. Then, diffidently, he inquired, "Please, sir, which back?"

"Didn't you hear what I said? My back! can't you tell a man's back from a horse's?"

Roidy did not respond, but hastened to do as bidden. Inwardly he rebelled at the cross voice and looks of the man-horse, and resolved some time to get even. How could he tell which back was meant?

The words of Sagittarius and Roidy seemed to interest Aquarius, who remarked, learnedly: "After mature deliberation I believe you will realize, Sagittarius, that the lad is

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not to be blamed for his question. To all intents and purposes, I apprehend that you and the horse are one. Then your back is his back, and his back your back. So when you mention 'my back' well might one ask 'which back?' Conversely, if your back is not the horse's back, the horse's back is not your back; in which case I make bold to inquire, why do you drag behind you a horse that does not belong to you, or why does the horse run around with a man who does not belong to him? Evidently, you would be liable to arrest for horse stealing, or the horse should be shot for man stealing. Wherefore, I conclude — ”

What he concluded, however, never will be known.

Here Taurus again commenced bellowing and pawing the sky in anger. Mr. Comet plainly showed his anxiety, but whether it was for Stella or his valued tail is hard to

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tell. At his suggestion Sagittarius prepared to act. Quickly he strung his bow, but while he was selecting an arrow, Aquarius once more delivered himself of an important idea.

“Wait a bit, Sagittarius,” said he, “until Taurus comes nearer, or until you have approached closer to him. I have carefully estimated the distance, and have ascertained that no bow can carry that far; nor, if that were possible, could any one hit so small a mark in so remote a place.”

“My stars!” shouted Sagittarius, waxing wroth. “You tell me what I can do, or what I can’t do? Stick to your crockery tub. Man and boy, horse and colt, I’ve roamed the sky and practised with bow and arrow since time began. I’ll bet you I hit that bull with the first arrow, and that he doesn’t wait for the second.”

His hot speech stung Aquarius, who an-

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swered sharply. A wrangle ensued as to what they should wager. The water-bearer offered to put up his jar against the bow and arrows of Sagittarius. The latter retorted sarcastically that he would not take the old bucket as a gift. They might have come to blows had not Mr. Comet suggested a plan which was agreed upon. If Sagittarius, with his first arrow, hit the bull and drove him away, Aquarius was to accompany him for a year, so that he always would have fresh water near by; if, on the other hand, Sagittarius failed, he was to carry Aquarius on his back — or rather, on the horse's back — for a similar period, so the latter would have a change from walking.

When these terms were settled definitely, Sagittarius stepped forward a few paces and prepared for the test. It was high time, too, for it could be seen that Taurus was on the point of charging them; but Stella, Mr.

STELLA'S ADVENTURES

Comet, Roidy, and even Sirius, in their interest in the wager, forgot the danger entirely.

Sagittarius now left nothing to chance. First he plucked a feather from one of his wings and tossed it in the air, so he might judge the wind; then he shaded his eyes with his hand, and, as if calculating the distance, gazed long at the mark; finally, with his four legs spread apart, his wings half raised, his tail nervously switching from side to side, his breast extended, he bent the bow till the arrow-head rested on his hand. For an instant thus he remained, motionless as a statue; and during this instant Taurus, who had been facing them, turned sideways and took one step forward.

The bowman had not time to alter his aim. Whang! went the bow and off sped the arrow. Stella, wildly excited, saw that it missed the half-bull, but pierced what

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would have been a portion of his side had he been a complete beast. Nevertheless, exactly as if wounded, Taurus gave a final bellow of wrath and fear combined, and hopped out of sight over the hill.

“A hit!” yelled Sagittarius; “A miss!” cried Aquarius, both in the same breath. Then took place a frantic argument, like none which Stella ever had heard. She could catch only brief sentences here and there.

“You never touched him. I’ll leave it to Mr. Comet.”

“I hit what would have been the vital spot if he’d all been there. Mr. Comet saw that himself.”

“The mark was Taurus, a half-bull. You missed him.”

“I shot at a bull. When a hunter sees part of his game he knows where the rest is. It’s not my fault that animal ends in

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the middle. A man who bets about a bull and tries to crawl out of it by setting up half a bull, is no sport."

"A man who bets he can hit Taurus, a half-bull, and claims to win, though he missed him a foot, is no gentleman."

"If you say another word I'll kick that earthen jar of yours all to pieces."

"Approach one step nearer and I will reduce it to fragments over your head."

While waged this war of words Stella edged over towards Mr. Comet, Roidy danced up and down, swinging his cap and shouting, "Fight! Fight!" and Sirius, yelping wildly, circled around them all.

It was time for Mr. Comet to act the part of peacemaker. Stepping between the disputants, he motioned them apart. "Be calm, gentlemen," he counselled. "There is a misunderstanding here, but no one is to blame. Sagittarius did not hit Taurus,

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as I am sure he will admit; but he made a fine shot, which would have pierced a whole bull, as Aquarius well knows. And what is more to the point, Taurus has disappeared, just as if he were wounded. So let's say no more about the bet, and thank the archer for his kindness in delivering us from danger. You must not ruin the reputation of all the stars by striking each other right before our little earth-friend."

"Yes, please behave," Stella pleaded; but Roidy looked disappointed. As he told Stella later, it would have been a dandy scrap if Mr. Comet had not interfered.

At the end of the Comet's speech the water-bearer and the bowman stopped talking, but each looked at the other defiantly, as though he himself would not be the first to make friendly advances. Finally, however, they shook hands very formally. Then

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Sagittarius, without a word, spread his wings and galloped away.

“Well, well!” said Mr. Comet as the party again commenced to stroll along; “after Mars, Sagittarius, and Taurus, it will rest my nerves to see some one of more gentle disposition. Widow Venus lives near here, and we’ll visit her at once.”

Stella now walked with Mr. Comet, while Aquarius and Roidy brought up the rear. As they proceeded she noticed that her companion’s spirits rose. Now and then he hummed a lively air. His tall hat was set jauntily on one side of his head; his left hand rested on his hip, and his right, thrust behind his back, flirted his coat-tails up and down at every step.

When Stella no longer could restrain her curiosity, she asked, “Whatever do you feel so fine about?”

“I’m thinking of Venus,” said the Comet,

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quieting down a little. "Superb woman, that! Beautiful, tender, loving—and they say she's rich, too. It isn't good for man to live alone. I might make up to her. What do you say? Too old?"

"No, indeed. And we can have the wedding while I'm here. Won't that be grand!"

"Not too fast. Perhaps I better mention it to the water-bearer. He's a great hand to have good ideas on all kinds of subjects. Aquarius, my friend, I am deliberating on matrimony. May I ask your views on the subject?"

"In that regard," replied he, "every man should be a law unto himself—beforehand. The woman is the law over him afterwards. Do as you please, if she pleases; but as for me, if I find it wearisome to carry my own burden now, how would it be were I compelled to bear those of a wife also?"

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This opinion, slowly and weightily expressed, seemed to have a cooling effect on Mr. Comet's enthusiasm. Plainly, there was more to the question than his simple soul at first had realized.

CHAPTER V

A VISIT TO VENUS' SCHOOL

FROM Cassiopeia's Chair the way so far had led across level fields. Now the country became more rolling, and the coloring darker. A line of purple hills drew nearer and nearer; and not far away rose the gem-crowned chain of mountains Stella had seen when first she alighted in star-land.

Again the little party marched along in silence. Mr. Comet and Aquarius still gravely considered the subject of marriage; Stella, in her supreme happiness, twisted her head now in this direction, now in that, so nothing might escape her; Roidy amused himself by dashing back and forth, as near as possible to the water falling from Aquarius' urn, as

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you have seen boys on the street run after a sprinkling-cart; and Sirius kept his position behind all the rest.

At length Mr. Comet shook his head with the manner of one who either has decided a question for good, or has resolved to defer it till the future. With this off his mind, he began to walk very slowly and to peer around intently.

"If I'm not much mistaken," said he, "Venus' new home is in this locality. We ought to be able to see the top of it, or at least one of the spires, very soon."

All now kept a sharp lookout, and it was only a few moments before Mr. Comet pointed out a cluster of lights, which he explained marked the towers and minarets on the habitation they were seeking.

As they approached, the outline of the entire mansion became distinctly visible; and as each detail of grace, beauty, and

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grandeur grew clearer and clearer, Mr. Comet held up both hands in astonishment. A look of interest and admiration came upon the face of even the stolid water-bearer. With one accord all halted, the better to take in the superb sight, — a tiny park surrounded by hills, among which, with the mountains for a background, lovingly nestled the charming villa of widow Venus.

Every once in a while, when Stella tries to tell me about her adventures on this wondrous night, she comes to a point where words fail her. All she can do is to gaze at me with her big, round eyes. Her lips move, but give forth no sound. Then, with a little sigh, she snuggles up close to me and says I must imagine for myself; some things she cannot describe at all. This always is her condition when she mentions Venus' home.

As she cannot picture the house to me,

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except in a general way, you too must imagine it for yourselves. Of course it was made from blocks, quarried out of the sky, and the appearance was that of purest marble. This made light blue the prevailing color of the body of the building, but the darker shades of the borders and cornices formed a pleasing contrast. There were portions of blue, green, and white, mottled like onyx. The little spires and domes covering the roof faded at their tops to glittering white. The whole effect, moreover, was not one of awesome grandeur, but of comfort and cosiness as well.

“Whe-e-e-w!” whistled Mr. Comet, after he had feasted his eyes sufficiently; “that beats anything I ever saw. Now, Stella, suppose you run on ahead and see how the sky lies. If all’s well, you wave your hand, and we’ll come in.”

Stella did not object to this in the least.

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Straight towards the house she hastened, and soon found herself on a broad walk, which led to the long, wide steps before the front entrance. As she approached, a flock of milk-white doves circled around her, and a giant swan, also white, save for his black head, gravely bent his neck in a dignified salutation.

Climbing up the steps, she passed between huge pillars, crossed a spacious porch, and timidly rapped upon the door. No one responded, although she could faintly hear the voice of some one singing, and strangest of all, the words and tune seemed those of a negro melody. Again and again she rapped, with no success; then she noticed near her right hand a little push-button.

"How stupid of me!" she said to herself. "Of course they have electric bells up here. All our lightning comes from the sky." Her push upon the button was followed, not by

STELLA'S ADVENTURES

the ringing of a bell, but by a tiny clap of thunder.

Immediately the singing stopped, and soon the door swung inwards. Now there stood before Stella, instead of the lovely creature she expected, a stout woman, her dress pinned up over her shoe tops, her sleeves rolled up to her elbows, and her head bound with a towel. Most surprising of all, her skin was unmistakably black.



“Bless your soul, honey!” ejaculated the woman, herself as much astonished as was Stella. “What in creation are you doing here?”

“Please, ma’m,” replied Stella, “if there’s no one else around, I’d like to bring Mr. Comet and some other friends in to call. They’re waiting back a little ways till I find out whether it’s all right.”

“No callers in here just at present,” re-

A VISIT TO VENUS' SCHOOL

plied the woman. "Bring 'em along soon as you want to. Every one and everything, big and little,—man, woman, child, or animal,—seem to be welcome in this place."

Stella gave one parting glance at the face above her, and half realized that, despite its hue, it was one of supreme beauty. Then she turned and dashed down the steps and along the path. Struggling for breath, she flung herself into Mr. Comet's arms.

"What's the matter?" he asked, tenderly. "If any one has been rude to you he must answer to me for it. Isn't Venus at home?"

"Yes, she's home," gasped Stella; "but she's black! You don't want to marry a black woman, do you?"

"Black!" shouted Mr. Comet in consternation; "the girl's crazy! Cheeks like the damask rose, forehead white as alabaster, lips like —"

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“But she is n't that way at all!” again cried Stella. “You've made a horrid mistake.”

“There's a mistake somewhere,” mused the Comet. Then suddenly his face brightened. “Now I have it. You did n't reach Venus at all. You must have seen Cassiopeia. She's the only colored lady I know of in the whole sky. Come to think of it, some one did tell me she's gone out to service. Caught cold sitting all night in her chair, and vowed she'd work out till she'd earned money enough to build a house over her. What did she say?”

“She said to come along, and that no one else was there,” answered Stella, feeling much better.

Mr. Comet now pulled down his cuffs, smoothed out his waistcoat, and polished his hat and shoes with his handkerchief. When he had made himself ready they set out briskly, and soon were before the open

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door. Venus, awaiting on the threshold, greeted them courteously. Stella found her all that Mr. Comet had promised. Tall, slender, and stately, clad in a simple gown of softest gray, she reminded Stella of her own mother. Her face was indeed in every way lovely beyond compare; but what most of all drew Stella to her was a womanly tenderness, a motherly bearing, that went straight to the child's heart, as Venus stooped and kissed her on the forehead.

"My very dear friends," she said in a low, clear voice, "truly am I glad to see you. Mr. Comet and you, Mr. Aquarius, are quite strangers. It is kind of you to visit me again. That must be one of the little Asteroid boys, of whom I am so fond; and this, Stella, the earth-child, of whose coming I have been told. And I see you have brought that magnificent Sirius, too. Come right in, all of you."

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“Not if I stay here!” called out an emphatic voice, which proceeded from the lips of Cassiopeia, who now, in a warlike attitude, took her stand right across the doorway. “Not all of ’em. Comet and Stella are all right; and Roidy, too, if he’ll scrape the sky off from his feet. But I won’t have that dog tracking all over my clean floors, or Aquarius slopping water around. Keep that dog out if you don’t want him hurt; and you, Aquarius, stand out in the yard. You’ll make a fine fountain! After a while you might come around to the kitchen and pour while I scrub the floor.”

“I’m very sorry, Aquarius,” said Venus, meekly; “but perhaps you better do as she requests, and take Sirius with you. My doves, and Cygnus, my swan, can bathe under you. Then it will be so nice if you will not mind going into the kitchen while Cassiopeia cleans it.”

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Patient as ever, Aquarius, accompanied by the dog-star, stalked down the steps.

"I hate to ask it of him," said Venus to Mr. Comet; "but you know maids must be humored these days. This servant question is such a grave one. They pack up and leave for the slightest cause. I have been housekeeping only five hundred years, and Cassiopeia is the third I have had. Would you believe it?"

With this remark, Venus took Mr. Comet's arm, and smiling to the children, ushered them down the long hall. As they reached the base of a broad, winding stairway, Stella overheard Mr. Comet say in a half-whisper, "Dear Venus, suppose we let Stella and Roidy amuse themselves. They can do no harm. Then you and I can have a chat, all alone, on the sofa in the parlor."

"Why, Mr. Comet," was Venus' response, "do you not know this is boys'-club day?"

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The scholars are upstairs now, waiting for me. I thought you had come to visit, and perhaps to make a little speech to us."

The Comet had not intended to drop in on any school; but Venus, as she spoke, beamed on him charmingly. How could he refuse? So he mumbled something about "great pleasure," though inwardly he was anything but delighted at the turn of affairs.

"You see," explained Venus, as they made their way upstairs, "we call this a boy's club, but it really is a school. I have become much interested in child study and training. The instruction ordinarily given is very narrow. So I have some twenty young Nebulae come here every evening, and we study together whatever takes our fancy. Often we amuse ourselves with history or biography, but this week our subject is earthology. It would surprise Stella to find out how much

A VISIT TO VENUS' SCHOOL

our savants here have learned about earth ways and customs."

When they entered the schoolroom Stella was given a chair on the platform, between similar ones occupied by the Comet and Roidy. While Venus arranged some books and papers on her desk, Stella had time to look about her. The scene was not an unfamiliar one. There was the usual black-board on three sides, and the desks, seats, chalk, pointers, and other furnishings seemed quite natural.

The Nebulae, who already were in their places, presented a strange appearance. The clothing of every one was yellow and white; their hair also was yellow, and very long and fluffy; and their hands and faces seemed semi-transparent. In fact they looked as though, were they not weighted down by their clothes, they would float away like thistle-down.

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Venus now took a position on the floor, between her desk and the front row of seats, and in a conversational tone addressed her pupils.

"I am glad to have you here, bright and early. You see, we have three visitors. Of Mr. Comet you have heard. The little Asteroid some of you know. We must try and persuade him to enter our club. (Here Roidy winked at Stella so comically that she almost snickered out loud.) Then we are honored by the presence of an earth-child, Stella, whom we all are exceedingly glad to meet. We must show her how much we have learned about her home."

"As it is Saturday," continued Venus, "we will first have a brief review. What have we been studying the past week? All together, please."

"Bees."

"Very good. And what are these bees?"

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“Earth animals.”

“Good again. How do we learn about them?”

For a few moments there was complete silence. Then a shrill voice cried out; “From dirty bits of paper.”

Here Venus turned to her visitors. “Perhaps you have heard, Mr. Comet, of the wonderful success attending the explorations of Father Neptune, who with his trident is digging along the banks of the Milky Way and in the adjacent caves. The papers he digs up must have been borne by the wind from the earth to the sky, and have floated down the stream. They are so soiled by the milk and torn by the winds that only a few words here and there can be read; but, you know, from just a word or two our scientists can deduce valuable facts.” Then, going back to her pupils, she asked, “Now, who will name one kind of bee we have investigated?”

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A dozen hands waved excitedly in the air.

"Number 13, you may answer."

"Husk-bees."

"Nearly right. Husking-bee is better. What does the husking-bee do?"

"Works in the fields."

"Very well; now let some one name another kind. You may try, Number 7."

"Sewing-bee."

"Correct. We see that these useful animals are trained to work in the house as well as outside. They must make the tasks of the earth-children much lighter. Doubtless our little visitor has a pet sewing-bee to help her with her work."

At this remark, Stella half rose to her feet to make explanation, but Mr. Comet restrained her.

"Ouch!" came a sudden and unexpected cry. All the Nebulae twisted around to

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see what was going on. Near the back of the room, in the midst of this confusion, one little fellow had arisen in the middle of the aisle, opposite his seat. On his face was a look of pain and bewilderment, and one hand was thrust behind his back.

“Number 3, what are you on your feet for?” called Venus, sternly. “And why did you make that noise?”

“Some one pinched me; an’ it hurt.”

For an instant Venus looked back towards the visitors, and apologized for the disturbance; while she was doing so, Number 2, who sat directly behind Number 3, reached over into the seat of the latter, drew therefrom some wriggling object, and before Venus could see him, quickly concealed it in his coat pocket.

Venus pursued her investigation. “Number 3, who pinched you?”

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"Don't know."

"Sit down. Who pinched Number 3?"

No answer.

"Number 2, did you do it?"

"No, m'm."

"Do you know who did it?"

"Did n't see anybody."

"Come here."

Number 2 shuffled down the aisle. His hands were thrust into the pockets of his trousers, while his drooping head suggested a guilty conscience.

"What have you in your pocket?"

"Hands."

"What else?"

"Handkerchief."

"Take it out."

Slowly, inch by inch, the handkerchief was pulled forth. Attached by one long, vicious claw to the last corner, there hung suspended a writhing, twisting animal, like

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Venus's School

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a lobster or mammoth crawfish. The culprit had been brought to light.

"Why did you bring that crab, Cancer, to school?" asked Venus, severely.

"He looked so lonesome out there on the sky; an' I like him."

"Why did you let him pinch Number 3?"

"Didn't let him. Put him on my desk so he could get some fresh air, an' forgot all about him. Must 've fallen over the back, an' Number 3 sat on him. Wasn't my fault."

"Well, you take Cancer and put him where he belongs. Then you go right home; and do not come back unless you bring a note from your father, and a promise to behave. Now march!" And Number 2, stuffing the crab into his pocket, marched.

This interruption did not seem to ruffle Venus' temper. Her voice remained low

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and sweet, though firm. But the Nebulae clearly were excited and not in a mood for their lesson. She at once realized this, and prepared to dismiss them.

“All of you be quiet for just a moment, and we will close for the night,” she said. “You can come again next week. Then we hope every one will be good and make no trouble. Our topic to-day was to have been the ‘quilting-bee.’ That must go over till next time, and we will take up the ‘pig-pen’ also.

“You must remember,” she concluded, “that one purpose of my work is to teach you to investigate for yourselves. Then some day you, too, can make interesting discoveries. So think all you can about the pig-pen. Have earth-people taught pigs to write with a pen, just as bees have been trained to husk and to sew? Carry your little note-books with you, and jot down

A VISIT TO VENUS' SCHOOL

your ideas as they come to you. Now you are dismissed, and be good little Nebulae."

As the scholars passed out, single file, Venus remarked to Stella; "Are you not surprised that we can collect so many facts from so few words? Is it not wonderful?"

"I *am* surprised," assented Stella, "but, don't you know, you are all wrong. Husking- and sewing- and quilting-bees are n't animals, and a pig-pen —"

"You need not argue with me," interrupted Venus, as Stella commenced to protest. "You must let your elders decide these points. Now, my dear Mr. Comet, I really am a little exhausted. Perhaps it would soothe me to visit with you in the parlor, as you suggested."

So Stella kept her peace. But deep down in her heart, she pondered. Could it be

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possible that some of the things she had been taught about people and animals existing thousands of years ago were as far wrong as was Venus' idea of the bees and the pig-pen?

CHAPTER VI

MERCURY, THE MESSENGER BOY

THE unexpected admission of Venus that she would enjoy a private chat in the parlor delighted Mr. Comet beyond all bounds. He tried to restrain himself, but plainly it was hard work. With a courtly bow he offered her his arm; with all the grace of one who dances the old-time minuet he escorted her out of the room, down the stairs, and along the hall; and standing to one side, again he bowed profoundly, as she preceded him into the drawing-room. The children were neither requested nor forbidden to follow. They were overlooked entirely.

“Let’s go see what Aquarius’s doing,” suggested Roidy. “He must be in the

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yard somewhere. Let's skip out the back way."

This suited Stella; but as they reached the rear of the building, Cassiopeia stopped them.

"Suppose you'll be up this way again, before long?" she inquired of Stella.

"Oh! I hope so. I'm having a perfectly grand time, and I'm coming back to-morrow night if I can."

"Well, I'll tell you what you do. You just bring me one of those woman's clubs I hear Venus talking about so much."

"A woman's club?"

"Yes, indeed; Venus says they are all the rage on the earth. I'd like one with a silver handle, to match my chair; but I'm not very particular as long as it's good and stout. It's getting so a lone woman up here ought to carry something with which to protect herself. There's that old Cepheus,

MERCURY, THE MESSENGER BOY

who almost pesters the life out of me. Used to hang about my chair all the time. Now, last night I caught him sneaking around here. You get me the club and then I'll be safe."

"But woman's clubs are not *clubs*!" shouted Stella, as soon as she had a chance to put in a word, and ignoring the question about Cepheus.

"Call it a stick, then, — cane, bat, spear, pole; name it anything you please, if I can whack or poke with it. If you don't bring that club next time you can't get into the house, and that's settled."

With this parting shot Cassiopeia rushed into an adjoining room, and slammed the door behind her. Stella did not care much. Gradually she was becoming used to these queer people, who knew more concerning the earth than she did.

Meanwhile Roidy, some distance away,

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had been waiting impatiently. Now he beckoned to Stella, and she started in his direction. Before she could reach him, however, a slight thunder-clap echoed from wall to wall.

"There's some one else come to visit," she called out. "I'm going to see who it is;" and back along the hall she ran, with Roidy close behind her.

As they approached the front entrance Venus emerged from the drawing-room. After her walked Mr. Comet. It could be seen at a glance that he, at least, did not relish this interference. His face was scowled and puckered, as though he had just bitten into a sour lemon.

When Venus had opened the door Stella saw something that startled her. For an instant she thought a telegram had come from her father; for there on the porch stood a fellow looking exactly like a mes-

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senger boy. He was clad in a dark blue uniform, decorated with narrow red braid. Over one ear there hung the regulation cap, with square visor. His shoes were run down at the heels, and his clothes were much the worse for wear. Still his freckled and good-natured face, and his roguish eyes, made him attractive rather than otherwise.

“Why, you must be Mercury, Jupiter’s messenger,” said Venus as soon as she set eyes on the boy.

“Yes ’m,” he replied, holding an envelope towards her. “I’ve brought a note for you, and the boss says I’m to wait for an answer.”

Venus glanced over the letter with evident pleasure. Mr. Comet looked on with just as evident displeasure. Poor man! Was it not too bad that he should be interrupted, and by his most bitter rival, when he was on the very point of asking the delicate question?

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But Venus, after she had finished reading, had no more time for Mr. Comet. "It is from Mr. Jupiter!" she exclaimed, joyfully; "and he wants me to go to the concert with him. The Pleiades Sisters are to sing. Isn't it dear of him? I've been dying to go. Mercury, tell your master 'yes' for me. I'm too excited to write anything."

Then suddenly she became aware of Mr. Comet's sorrowful visage. "Are you ill, my dear friend?" she asked, anxiously. "It is close in the parlor. The fresh air will do you good. I don't suppose there was anything in particular you wanted to tell me? Just some of your nonsense. Now you will excuse me, I am sure, for I must go and change my gown. Come again, all of you;" and Venus disappeared up the stairway.

Wrathfully Mr. Comet strode out of the house and down the steps. Stella could hear him mumbling something about "fresh

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air” and “nonsense.” She doubted whether or not she should follow him till he had cooled off; but as he reached the yard he settled the matter by saying, “You and Roidy wait here a minute, while I find Aquarius. Then we may as well tramp. No use staying here.”

Mr. Comet’s actions amused Mercury. “Old gent’s hard hit,” he chuckled. “He’s swell, all right; but he can’t hold a candle to Jupiter. Nobody gets ahead of us.”

Then Mercury took from his pocket an odd instrument. It apparently was made from a strip of tortoise shell bent into a half-circle, with strings drawn tightly from side to side. This he placed against his lips, like a jew’s-harp, and quickly produced a rollicking tune, to which he danced a most intricate double shuffle. When he had relieved his feelings



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in this manner, he sat down, leaned against one of the pillars, jerked his cap over his eyes, and proceeded to read a thumb-worn nickel library, which he pulled from another pocket.

"What's that you were playing on?" asked Roidy.

"My lyre. Think it's a drum?"

"Let me try it?"

"Not much! You'd bust it."

"What you reading?"

"'Nebula Number Ninety; or the Nimrod of the North.'"

"Any good?"

"You bet!"

"Let me read it?"

"Naw! You're too young."

These rebuffs were a little too much for Roidy, and he clenched his fists threateningly; but Mr. Comet's voice, urging them to come on, now made itself heard.

"Wait till I catch you alone!" growled

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Roidy; and with this final threat, to which Mercury deigned no response, he and Stella ran around the house.

In the back-yard they found Mr. Comet and the water-bearer in conversation over a curious beast with the front half of a goat and the hind half of a fish.

“This must be Capricorn,” Aquarius was saying; “a most uncommon and outlandish combination. I have seen pictures of him, but never before have I had a chance to examine him. He is very gentle, and seems to be enjoying himself. First he took a good drink for his head-quarters, and now he is giving his hind-quarters a swim. It would afford me great satisfaction to carry him with me, so that I might study him further.” Sirius, meanwhile, was standing near-by, and barking furiously. Clearly, he was willing to fight a goat, but the fish part was beyond his understanding.

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“Bring him along if you want to,” said Mr. Comet. “It is high time we were going.”

Roidy and Stella started at once, but Aquarius made no move.

“What is the matter?” questioned Mr. Comet. “Are you tired of our company?”

Aquarius acted as though at loss how to reply. Awkwardly he stood, first on one foot and then on the other. At length he plucked up courage, and remarked boldly: “Your companionship is most agreeable, and it is with reluctance that I deprive myself of it, even for the time being. Between friends the truth always should be spoken. Some time back I discoursed adversely on the question of matrimony. Then my views were based entirely on theory. Since I have come in contact with the bewitching Cassiopeia I am inclined to change my mind. Not only is she a being of great intellect,

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comely features, and lovable disposition, but she already has amassed a tidy sum. Soon we shall be able to erect a comfortable home over her silver chair. What the future has in store for him no man knows; but it is fitting that I should remain here and converse again with her."

"Well, I declare!" cried Mr. Comet; "you ought to have learned from the experiences of others."

"That you have been unsuccessful in your wooing," resumed Aquarius, "which from your countenance I judge to be the case, does not necessarily augur that a similar fate awaits me. Yet, what will be, will be. Fare you well, one and all. Sometime we shall meet again."

The failure of his love affair at first had a gloomy effect on Mr. Comet; but after a few moments he gained control of himself and turned his attention to his little com-

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rades. Grasping Stella's arm with one hand, and Roidy's with the other, he stepped along quite spryly. Soon the three were laughing and talking at the same time, and as gayly as though there were not a care in all the sky.

When they had left Venus' villa far behind, the path they were following suddenly merged into a hard, well-travelled highway, which extended, straight as an arrow, as far as the eye could see. This, Mr. Comet said, was the air-line across the sky from north to south. By following it they would come to the best ford across the Milky Way. He suggested that they push on to the ford at once, unless Stella would like to wait and rest a bit.

Stella insisted that she was not tired at all; but event had followed event so rapidly that her head was in a whirl, and she thought it would be a good idea to stop and be quiet

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for a while. So, in a little hollow by the roadside, protected from the wind, the three sat down in comfort. Stella leaned her head against Mr. Comet, who put his arm around her protectingly; and Roidy, for a cushion, used Sirius, who stretched himself out at full length beside them.

Stella does not know exactly how long they remained there; but it was an hour or more, and would have been longer had they not been disturbed. A shrill whistle caused them to look up, and there in the road before them was Mercury. His cap was in his hand, and the perspiration on his forehead showed that he had been exercising more than usual.

“Gee!” he exclaimed; “the boss ’s in a big rush, and I had to run. Say, Mr. Comet, Jupiter ’s busted his belt, and wants to borrow your ’spenders.”

“By the great North Pole!” cried the

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Comet, bounding to his feet with the agility of an india-rubber man; "does your master intend to insult me?"

"Nope," answered Mercury, not at all abashed. "Didn't you hear what I said? Jupiter's broke's belt, and's hidin' in the hills back of Venus' house. Can't go in till he gets fixed, and has n't time to send back home for another. Said you'd lend him your 'spenders. You aren't goin' into society, and can get along somehow."

Mr. Comet drew himself up with great dignity. "Make known to your master," said he, "that, while I have no social engagement for this evening, I always am extremely careful of my personal appearance. Inform him also, please, that I am journeying without luggage, and have with me no wearing apparel aside from what is necessary for my own requirements."

"Hey, Commy!" gasped Mercury; "you

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don't 'spect me to use all those long words, do you? If you do, write 'em down; or I'll just tell him you need all your 'spenders yourself. How's that?"

"You have the correct idea," said Mr. Comet. "The precise words are immaterial to me. Now you will please submit us to no further annoyance."

Then he turned his back on Mercury, who, mopping his brow, hesitated, as though much perplexed. He hated to return empty-handed.

Here a bright idea occurred to Stella. Reaching down into her pocket, she found a package of safety-pins she had used when she had helped to dress her baby brother that morning. These were just the thing. Running up to Mercury, she handed them to him, saying, "You just take these to Jupiter. I don't need them, and we've plenty more, home. You can pin his belt

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together in the back, so Venus won't ever know it."

Mercury's face cleared instantly. "Thanks, awfully!" he said. "I was 'fraid to go back with nothin';" and with a parting grin he dashed away.

The country through which they now were passing presented no new features. The hills and mountains, on one side, towered in all their glory, and on the other was the ever-present level blue. Stella says that in all her journey, she never grew weary of gazing at the beautiful colors, but she thinks she would rather live on the earth. The sky in time might become monotonous. It cannot have the contrasts afforded by our tree-clad hills and cultivated fields, or by the changing seasons.

Nothing of importance happened on the road, and soon the party came to the bank of the Milky Way. The appearance of this

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stream was something of a disappointment to Stella. In the shallows along the shore, where the blue shone through the milk, the effect was quite pretty; and the golden yellow of the swells and ripples in the centre was pleasing. But all in all, Stella is of the opinion it does not compare for beauty with some of our clear brooks and rivers.

Now arose the query as to how Mr. Comet and the children were to cross; for they desired to wander down the opposite bank, and see if they could not find Father Neptune, who was supposed to be digging thereabouts. Children as short as Stella and Roidy could not wade without danger. Mr. Comet could carry them over, one at a time, on his back; but that would ruin his shoes, hose, and breeches.

Stella suggested that if they could find a plank large enough, or make a raft, and if Mr. Comet would spread his tail for a sail,

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they would be across in no time. This, she told them, is the way squirrels do; but the idea did not seem to strike Mr. Comet favorably, even if there had been any boards around. Roidy interrupted their deliberations by calling their attention to something making haste towards them along the highway.

“Sagittarius!” cried all in chorus. No sooner was the word spoken than again, with waving wing and beating hoof, there bore down on them the familiar form of the bowman, and to their surprise, clinging in desperation to the horse’s back, and bouncing up and down at every step, rode the water-bearer, Aquarius.

Stella was overjoyed to see them in such friendly companionship, and was all eagerness to find out what had occurred since she had parted with them.

CHAPTER VII

A CHAT WITH FATHER NEPTUNE

WHEN within a few feet of Mr. Comet and the others, Sagittarius stopped with a jerk so sudden that Aquarius was thrown violently against his back.

“What’s the matter with you?” cried the archer. “Is there not room enough below, so that you need not try to crawl up and ride on my shoulders?”

Aquarius made no reply. It is doubtful if at that time he had any breath left with which to speak. As if in fear that Sagittarius might start up again, he instantly half slid and half tumbled to the ground. At first he swayed from side to side, but he braced up quickly, although for some time

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his knees wobbled under him. Stella saw that he looked around with a dazed expression, and straightened out each arm and leg separately, to assure himself that no part of him had been dropped on the way. His urn was placed carefully on its side on the sky.

After a few words of friendly greeting, all began to speak and to ask questions at once. There seemed to be a contest between Sagittarius, Stella, and Roidy, to see who could talk the loudest and fastest. Aquarius, too, though with some difficulty, managed to emit a few long words; and Sirius improved the opportunity to show off his finest assortment of yelps and howls.

“Peace! peace!” cried Mr. Comet. “Be quiet, all of you. Every one wishes to hear from every one else, but we must go about it in a proper manner. Now that I have called the meeting to order, I shall continue

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to preside, unless some one objects, and shall summon you in turn to recount whatever may be of interest to us. As there is no protest," he continued, "we will first hear from Sagittarius."

"You all remember," commenced the archer, "that I left you somewhat in a huff because my arrow seemed to have hit only that part of Taurus which he does not carry around with him. Well, it kept running through my head all the time that Taurus, when he departed after my shot, bellowed and limped like one in pain. How could this be if I had missed him entirely? An arrow flies swiftly. Could we all have been mistaken?"

"To satisfy myself on this point, I trotted over the hill and took up the trail. No trace of blood could be found; but to an experienced hunter like myself the signs were those of an animal sorely wounded.

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The tracks led into a little gully not far away. I stole noiselessly up to the edge, and cautiously peeped over. Now, what do you think I saw?"

"Taurus, stone dead!" cried Stella.

"And with a big hole in his shoulder!" added Roidy.

"Not at all!" remarked Sagittarius. "You both are wrong. The half-bull lay there before me, true enough, but he was not dead. He was breathing heavily, and groaning. Yet not a wound could I see, and I was close enough to count every hair. Then I aroused him by a shout. Up he rose, weakly and painfully, and off he staggered down the gully. No blood, no arrow-mark; and yet I never saw an animal appear more grievously injured. Can any one explain? It's too much for me."

For some time all were speechless. Then Stella brightened up as though she had

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guessed the riddle. "I don't believe I can tell how it happens," she said; "but I know something just like it. My Uncle George lost both his legs in the war. Had them cut off right above his knees. That was ever so many years ago; but when the weather is damp he still has rheumatism in his toes. Now, if he can suffer in the place where his feet would be if they weren't cut off, why could n't Taurus be hurt in the place where his side would be if he had one?"

This solution seemed satisfactory to all, and particularly to the archer, who was delighted to have it admitted that he really had damaged Taurus.

"I saw no reason to follow him," he went on, "so I strolled around aimlessly till I reached the high road. Then I thought I would run down to the Milky Way. My hoofs get cracked on this hard sky, and the

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milk is healing to them. In a short time I overtook Aquarius, plodding along so wearily and woefully that I had n't the heart to remain mad at him. There is nothing in the sky better for one's body or spirits than a brisk horseback ride. I invited him up, and here we are. If he enjoyed himself he has a queer way of showing it, but he can speak for himself."

"Yes, my good Aquarius," said Mr. Comet; "if you are able, tell us what has happened since I left you with the love-light in your eyes."

The water-bearer drew a long breath, which sounded suspiciously like a sigh, and in his usual deliberate way addressed the others. "It is a fact," said he, "that you left me in a happy mental condition. Of a truth, I was inspired by lofty ideals and moved by noble motives. When I told you of my love for Cassiopeia, I based my

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tender passion on three things, — her great intellect, comely features, and lovable disposition. This was aside from her money, which I beg you to believe was a minor consideration.

“On two of these points I was right,” he continued. “She is a woman of strong powers of mind, and, in my judgment, she yields to no one in appearance. But as to disposition I was deceived most bitterly. No sooner had I remarked, innocently, that I am getting near the period where one desires to settle down in a home, than she glared at me ferociously. Then, when I incidentally inquired whether she was planning her new house so it would be big enough for two, she took after me with a butcher-knife. Had she not stumbled over Capricorn, who had crawled near the door, I actually believe I should not be alive to tell the tale.”

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Here Aquarius paused, and rubbed his hand across his troubled brow. "I do not wish to burden you further with my trouble," said he. "That I shall soon recover my customary peace of mind, I doubt not, and in the meantime you must bear with me."

Stella now hoped they would take up their travels at once, as she was anxious to see Father Neptune. The first question was how to reach the other side of the Milky Way. Sagittarius told them to wade. He said it was only up to his breast. Stella started to ask him which breast, the man's or the horse's. Then she remembered Roidy's experience, and held her tongue.

When Mr. Comet had pointed out that Stella and he could not go over in this manner without ruining their clothes, the archer had another scheme. He would carry Mr. Comet and Stella on his horse's

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back; Aquarius, clinging to his tail, could take Roidy on his shoulders, and Sirius could swim. This plan was adopted.

Aquarius at first protested that he could not go at all, as it was impossible to stop the flood from his jar, and there was a law, with severe penalties, against watering the milk. But he was persuaded easily. To this day Stella does not know whether he was joking or in earnest.

So they passed over. Don't you wish you could have seen them? Stella says it must have been a funny spectacle, and I agree with her. First went Sagittarius, his head and man-body extending high above the stream; in front, on the horse's back, sat Mr. Comet, his legs crossed under him Turk fashion, and the long tails of his coat folded carefully in his lap; behind him perched Stella, hanging on to him with one hand, and with the other holding her skirts up out of the

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milk; next came Aquarius, firmly grasping Sagittarius' tail, while Roidy roosted on his shoulders like a little old man of the sea; and last of all swam Sirius, having more fun than all the rest of them put together.

In safety all reached the opposite bank, where the riders dismounted. While Aquarius was rinsing the milk from his limbs and those of Sagittarius, the latter asked Mr. Comet where he intended to go next.

"Up the stream," he replied, "till we find Neptune, who is digging around here somewhere. You'll come with us, of course?"

"Not I!" said the archer; "Neptune claims to have invented the horse. Anyway, he's a great horse-fancier, and can't see that I am anything more than a beast. I've heard that he'd like to hitch me up to a plow and make me help him. But I am not looking for trouble, and will leave you. Good-bye, all. Perhaps I shall run across

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that Lion, Leo, and if I do, I'll send you his skin later."

For some time now the four companions, with Sirius trotting near them, wandered along the bank of the Milky Way. When they came to the place where the river pierced the hills, the course twisted abruptly to the left. As they turned the bend, they saw that the sky was rough and broken, and strewn with blocks and fragments. While they paused to look around, the head and shoulders of a man unexpectedly appeared above the pile of chunks in front of them. The rest of him followed slowly, as if he were pulling himself up out of a hole. Then he drew after him what seemed to be a long and heavy pole, with three tines at one end, like a pitchfork or fish-spear. Stella knew at once that this must be Neptune.

When he saw that he had company, he

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shaded his eyes with his hand for an instant, as does one who gazes out over the waves; then, with a shout of recognition, he came forward rapidly, and with the rolling gait peculiar to sea-faring men. His face, reddish brown, as though tanned by the wind, was surrounded by a bushy, snow-white beard; a blue flannel shirt and baggy trousers of the same color made up his costume; and his feet were bare. Upon his head there sat, grotesquely, a much battered and dented golden crown, and in his right hand he carried that ridiculous three-pronged stick.

There could be no doubt about the sincerity of his welcome. He grasped Mr. Comet's delicate right hand in one of his horny paws, and the other he brought down with a resounding whack on the bare shoulder of Aquarius. At the same time, with a voice that could have been heard above any



Father Neptune

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gale that ever blew, he roared out: "Welcome, my hearties! It has been many a voyage since we have spun yarns together. Shall we stay here on the deck, or will you climb down into my cabin, over yonder?"

"Perhaps it will be best to stay where we are," replied Mr. Comet. "Aquarius, I fear, will be in no condition to climb either down or up till he has recovered from his horse-back ride."

"Where did you get your horse?" asked Neptune, interested at once.

"It was Sagittarius, who in mistaken kindness carried me," replied Aquarius.

"Sagittarius!" sneered Neptune, disdainfully. "Call him horse? You ought to have seen the animals that once drew my chariot across the briny deep! Hoofs of brass and manes of gold! They were something like it. But Sagittarius is neither man nor horse. Might do to plow with, but

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never to ride. A half of one thing joined to a half of another makes nothing."

"But my arithmetic says two halves make a whole," piped Roidy.

"Right enough, sonny; but that means halves of the same kind. To stick different ones together not only makes a bad whole, but spoils two good halves. Now, bless me, if that little girl is not staring at me as though her eyes would pop out of her head! What is the trouble?"

"I was trying to think why you wear a crown and carry that queer stick all the time," confessed Stella.

"True for you," said Neptune. "If you find out, let me know. It's a habit, that's all. The crown's a nuisance. Falls off every time I bend over to dig; and I've worn a sore ring all around my head, putting it back on so often. Every time it drops it gets a new scratch or dent, till now

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it's such a dilapidated old can that Capricorn, the goat, wouldn't eat it.

"No wonder that trident puzzles you, too," he continued. "It beats me. It's too long for a cane, too heavy for a fish-pole, and hasn't cover enough for an umbrella. But I've lugged it around ever since I can remember. It's a habit. Seems to run in the family. Why in time does my father, Saturn, always carry a sickle? Never cut anything in his life; but he packs it constantly, just the same. Reckon I must be true to family traditions. Here am I, poking around in the sky with a pointed stick, like a clam-digger, and once I ruled the ocean. But my labor is lightened by love. That makes it sweet."

"You must be fond of your work, indeed," said Stella.

"Fond of fiddlesticks!" roared Neptune. "Do you think I root around here because

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I like it? These foolish scientists make me tired. Now I'll tell you the secret. Venus and her scholars are interested in these bits of paper which I find,—and I love Venus. Seen her lately, Mr. Comet?"

Now it was Mr. Comet's turn to hide his countenance; and a wan smile flitted over the face of Aquarius.

"What's the matter with you two, anyway?" growled Neptune. "Can't a fellow ask a question?"

To smooth matters over, Stella remarked quickly, "I understand how you feel about your work, and I know you will succeed. My book says, 'Love conquers all things.'"

"Don't quote mottoes to me," cried Neptune. "I followed one once and it spoiled my life."

"That cannot be," observed Aquarius. "Mottoes are pure wisdom."

"Pure fol-de-rol!" shouted Neptune.

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“Hear me now. In my young days I was ruler of all the ocean. You should have seen me, standing in my chariot, brandishing my trident, and urging on the fiery steeds that drew me over the waves. Even the storms obeyed me. You remember, Stella, how I made Aeolus call the wind back into his cave when, against my wishes, he was about to wreck the ships of Aeneas?”

“I am just beginning Virgil,” she answered. “We will come to that in a short time, I suppose.”

“Well,” resumed Neptune, “I was not satisfied with all this glory and power. My soul thirsted for something still greater. One day I read the motto, ‘Hitch your chariot to a star.’ That settled it. I must go to the sky. Seemed to me like a higher position, — a rise in the world, so to speak. Now here I am, and here I must stay. Long ago my coach rotted to pieces. Up

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I came; and it's a pretty come down, is n't it? Gaze on me, will you? Do I look like one who for years was monarch of the ocean?" And he wrathfully jammed his trident into a crack, till the tines bent double.

"But I think it's very pleasant here," said Stella, trying to comfort him.

"Yes, it's nice enough for girls, comets, water-bearers, asteroids, and dogs," muttered Neptune. "No offence intended," he added quickly; "but I was born for a different life. What would n't I give once more to sniff the salty breeze, and to hear the billows dash against my chariot's sides."

"I know where there's a ship up here," cried Roidy, also trying to help out.

"The good old Argo," said Neptune, sadly. "Yet her time is past. Even if it were not so, I would not insult her by launching her in a puddle of milk. Well

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do I remember when Jason proudly strode her deck, above a hold filled with golden fleece.”

At these last two words Mr. Comet pricked up his ears curiously. “What kind of stuff was that?” he inquired. “Anything like my tail?” But Neptune did not heed him.

“There’s no use in grumbling,” he concluded. “Venus and I shall live quite happily together, I am sure. You’ll call upon us often; you particularly, Mr. Comet. She frequently has told me that you remind her of her grandfather. What are you dancing up and down that way for? Pin hurt you? You’re the touchiest old man I ever did see.”

“I am thinking that we must be going at once,” replied Mr. Comet, gravely. “There is just about time enough for us to visit the double cave of the Moon and Sun on the mountain-top.”

“Well, a safe voyage,” cried Neptune.

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“Do not think of me as unhappy. I shall get along all right. If I only could smell the salt sea breeze just once more, I should be content. Now all I get is a whiff of sour milk! At dawn, when the Milky Way is about dried up, the odor is positively sickening.”

While he was making this last remark Mr. Comet and the others had recommenced their journey. All at once Stella heard Neptune calling to her to wait a minute. As he ran towards her, she could see that his face shone as if he had some bright idea, and with every step he smote his thigh gleefully.

“When you come up again,” he whispered in her ear, “bring me a bunch of old papers. I’ll hide ’em in my cabin. Every now and then I’ll tear off a piece for these scientists. Won’t have to dig any more. You’ll be sure and do it?”

And Stella promised she would not forget.

CHAPTER VIII

JUPITER, WITH HIS THUNDERBOLT, TO THE RESCUE

THE walking now was very difficult, and Stella was glad she had put on her heavy shoes. Carefully Mr. Comet picked his way over the uneven surface and around huge boulders. With equal care the others, single file, trod after him. Stella now could see how fortunate it was he could coil his tail up out of the way. Such bad going would have ruined it forever.

At first there was no track at all. Keeping as near as possible to the Milky Way, they simply went wherever it seemed easiest. The hills on both sides kept growing higher and higher. Here and there these approached

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so close to the bank, and descended so abruptly, that there was barely room for two to march abreast.

The stream, too, became more and more confined; it purled and gurgled as it swiftly swept along its sky-strewn bed, or dashed in foaming breakers against the pebbly banks. Clearly, the travellers were entering the canyon Mr. Comet had mentioned, and Stella began to wonder how they ever could get out of it.

The others proceeded so confidently, however, that she did not become alarmed. Mr. Comet acted as one who knows what he is about; Aquarius splashed along as earnestly as usual; Roidy dropped behind now and then to skip flat pieces of sky across the river; and the face of Sirius was no more solemn than customary. So Stella kept her thoughts to herself, and waited to see where they would come out.

JUPITER TO THE RESCUE

Soon they emerged suddenly into a small park. Here Mr. Comet swerved aside, and struck into a well-worn road which traversed the opening and led up and over the hill which formed its boundary. For some reason he seemed to be in a hurry; and following him without talking, they quickly crossed the valley and climbed the steep ascent on the other side. When they arrived at the top all were out of breath, and paused for a moment's rest.

Stella seated herself on a little ledge and looked about her. The view was superb. Away to her left, as she faced the river, the chain of mountains with their glittering peaks extended in either direction as far as the eye could reach. To her right, spread out before her, lay the rolling hills through and over which she had just come; and beyond them, near the horizon, could be seen the blue-green plains. In front of

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her, from the very edge of the road, the bluff slanted directly down to a level place a few yards wide, beyond which the river rushed and roared. On either hand this sheer descent was so broken and jagged that no one could pass up or down over it; but right in front of Stella was a narrow line, so smooth and even that it reminded her of a toboggan slide.

While she had been taking in the view, Roidy had been amusing himself by rolling stray fragments down the path, and shouting as he watched them glide and plunge into the stream. Now she jumped down to join him in his sport.

"Look out; both of you!" cautioned Mr. Comet. "If you slip off there, how we should ever get you back is more than I know."

The warning came too late. Stella was bending over to start just one more piece,

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when Sirius, who always with great interest watched everything that went on, brushed against her. For an instant she tottered on the brink. Then she lost her balance completely and with a little shriek fell upon the sleek incline.

There was nothing which she could grasp, nor was there anything to retard her. Faster and faster, straight as an arrow from the archer's bow, she slid from top to bottom. Fortunately, near the end of her fall, her gown caught on a sharp, projecting point. The tough cloth held for a second, and this seemed to ease her fall. As she approached the level space she rolled over and over, and finally came to a gentle stop against a mound upon the bank. Surprised to find herself alive, but really more frightened than hurt, she jumped to her feet.

It was a perilous position in which she found herself. Behind her madly dashed

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the Milky Way; in front was the slippery path up which she could not possibly climb; and on both sides of this the sky was so precipitous, cracked, and craggy as to be absolutely impassable for a little girl.

"Stella! Stella!!" she heard Mr. Comet calling. "Are you hurt?"

"No!" she cried back, briefly. Wisely, she thought it best not to tire herself with long sentences.

"Stand still, right where you are!" came the answer. "We'll get you up some way." But the voice betrayed an anxiety hard to conceal.

So Stella waited for further orders. Gradually, as she became used to her strange surroundings, she began to look around curiously. Among the blocks and chunks which lined the bank she happened to notice, a hundred yards or so away, a long, dark object like a tree-trunk. There was

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nothing very odd in this at first; but soon it seemed to roll and turn, as though alive.

Stella gazed at it intently. There was no question about the motion now, for the writhing and twisting were visible distinctly. Then suddenly, stretching out towards her, arose in the air the flat head and scaly neck of an immense snake, swinging from side to side and hissing angrily at the intruder. She could see the baleful eyes, the forked tongue, the cruel fangs! Now all was clear to her. That smooth path was the trail of Hydra, the serpent, to his resting-place beside the river, and she had tumbled right into his lair. Escape was impossible. With a single sob she sank in a little heap on the sky!

There, too dazed really to feel the pangs of fear, she lay motionless. Half consciously she understood that the serpent's head, still wagging back and forth, had drawn a little nearer; and that her friends above her were

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frantically trying, by shouting and by rolling rocks, to divert his attention.

She realized too, though also dimly, that they were joined by a tall and shapely stranger, who seemed to quiet them with a simple wave of his hand. As she gazed, he leaned over the hillside and looked intently towards the place where she knew must be that swaying head and sinuous body. Next he drew himself to his full height and raised his right arm far above his head. In the uplifted hand she noticed a shining ball, dark yellow, like an orange. This, with a mighty effort which strained his entire frame, he now hurled downward through the air.

Fascinated, Stella watched the object's course. Strange to say, it seemed to move slowly, as though it might drop anywhere;





The Thunder-bolt about to strike Hydra

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but ever it kept its course, just above the slanting cliffs below, and with every foot of progress it grew brighter and brighter. Finally, for an instant it paused over the spot where lay that hateful, loathsome reptile, the cause of all their dread. Then came a blinding flash, a deafening crash, and Stella knew no more.

Slowly she came to herself again. Aside from a ringing in her ears and a slight numbness she was uninjured.

After the awful events of the past few moments many girls would have been utterly distracted. But we have learned already that Stella is brave and self-possessed; so now she struggled to her feet to learn what had happened. The stranger could not be seen; but Mr. Comet, Roidy, and even the grave water-bearer, were dancing around and shouting with joy, while Sirius kept them company.

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In a few moments she mustered up courage enough to look towards the serpent. The ugly head and neck had disappeared. Part of the body still was visible, but it lay motionless. You can imagine her relief when she perceived that Hydra would trouble her no more.

This sudden rescue from one great danger caused her spirits to rise rapidly. "Well," she said, "I'm glad to be rid of that nasty old snake. Wonder who the man is who threw the bomb. But there's no use talking about it now; I must get out of here just as fast as ever I can." She tried one side of the path and then the other, with no result except to scratch her hands and bruise her knees. But she would not give up, and was nerving herself for another effort when the voice of Mr. Comet reached her ears.

"Don't wear yourself all out," he called. "Keep perfectly quiet. I've thought of an

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easy way to pull you up here safe and sound."

Scarcely had he ceased speaking when she saw, creeping over the rim and down the path, a yellow mass which at first she thought must be another bomb. As it came nearer she realized the truth. It was Mr. Comet's tail, by means of which he was going to drag her out of danger. Soon she plunged her hands into the golden strands, and pressed her cheek lovingly against them. It seemed so good to take hold of something that was part of one she loved, even if it were only a tail.

"Crawl up into it a little way," shouted Mr. Comet, "and wrap yourself up in it. Let me know when you are ready."

Grasping the fibres in her hands, Stella stowed them about her and over her, till at last she was covered entirely, snug as a bug in a rug, secure as though packed in excelsior.

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“All ready!” she called. Immediately she heard the clicking sound as the tail recoiled; and she felt herself being drawn, slowly but surely, along and up the way she had descended so swiftly. The next thing she knew she was standing in the road again, with all her friends about her.

She recognized Roidy, digging his knuckles into his eyes as though he had been crying; and Aquarius, his face for once split in two with a grin like a jack o' lantern; and she felt Sirius press his cold nose against her hand, as he mutely begged her pardon. The stranger, too, was near-by. But her eyes all were for Mr. Comet. With a sigh of contentment she sprang into his outstretched arms and nestled against his breast.

“My dear, dear child; my precious little friend!” he whispered in her ear. “Had you been harmed or killed I never should

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have forgiven myself. If Jupiter, with his thunderbolt, had not come along, I fear you would have been lost. No; you need not thank him now. Rest for a few moments. Are you sure you are not hurt?"

"Not the least bit," she answered, throwing her arms around his neck; "but I'm dreadfully afraid you have mussed that beautiful tail so it never will be as elegant again."

"That's a good girl," replied Mr. Comet; "always thinking of others. But my tail will be better off than ever. Exercise is good for it, and it ought to be spread out for an airing every once in a while. Why, once I carelessly left it covered up too long and the moths got in it. Honestly, I was ashamed to show it for over a century."

"I'll bring you a few moth-balls when I come up again. And how would you like to have some powdered rose-leaves, like mother

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puts between my summer dresses when she lays them away? Then your tail will smell perfectly lovely. And I'll tell you what I'll do, too; I'll bring you a bottle of the hair restorer papa uses to rub around the bare spot on the back of his head. Like as not you could grow a fine lot of hair, and wouldn't be bald at all."

"Bless her kind heart!" murmured Mr. Comet; "bring them all, and thank you very much. The moth-balls and rose-leaves are just what I want; and if my hair grew out I'd look younger, and perhaps Venus—"; here he checked himself suddenly. Then he added: "What a silly old man I am! Just as well we should not mention that again. After all, Stella dear, we old folks realize that nowhere in earth or heaven is there mortal love more satisfying than the tender, unselfish love of a little child."

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In chatting this way with Mr. Comet she forgot the danger from which she had just escaped. Her full strength came back to her, and she slipped from Mr. Comet's arms to the ground. With a word to Roidy, a smile to Aquarius, and a pat for Sirius, she turned her attention to the stranger to whom she owed her life.

Such a big person she never before had seen. His height must have been nearly seven feet, and his body was broad in proportion. From the top of his bare head his oily locks fell in profusion around his neck and shoulders. His garments, in color a royal purple, were of finest texture, and fitted him perfectly, though loosely. Another item, which could not escape notice, was a broad belt, glittering as though set with costly gems. It encircled his body so tightly that the cloth in places hung over it in folds.

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“You killed that horrid snake for me,” said Stella, looking up into his good-natured face, “and I’m ever so much obliged. You’re so strong and brave.”

Before he could reply, an idea suddenly occurred to her. Running around behind him she lifted up the edge of his sack-coat. As she expected, the belt was joined together with three safety-pins. That settled it. Her rescuer was Jupiter, as Mr. Comet had said.

Her action amused Jupiter greatly, and he laughed heartily. “You’re looking for those safety-pins, are you?” said he. “They’re there, all right; and a good job they did, too. You rescued me with your pins, and I rescued you with my bolt. That’s a fair exchange, is it not?” And again he laughed till the hills seemed to shake.

“Was that really and truly a thunder-bolt?” asked Stella.

“Yes, indeed; ball lightning, I believe

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you folks call them. Always try to keep a sphere or two of it with me. Comes in handy sometimes. Chain lightning is a trifle more deadly; but it's harder to carry around, and it's more difficult to aim it straight, too. These balls are the handiest for general purposes."

"Have you many other kinds of bolts?"

"Lots and lots of them. More than you'll find in a hardware store. Keep them at home, put up in assorted packages, as the clerks say."

"Oh! I do wish you'd let me have one tiny little one to take back with me. I'll fire it off next Fourth of July."

"Sorry, but I haven't one with me now. Used to carry a lot of them all the time, just for the fun of the thing; but I had an accident and quit it."

"You didn't get hurt, did you?"

"Mighty near it. You see I had this belt

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made into a cartridge belt, like the soldiers wear, and filled all the places clear around my body with bolts. That worked all right for a few days, and I had a pile of fun scaring folks with them. But once I scraped my arm carelessly across the tops of them, just as you might rub something over the heads of a bunch of matches. Well, they all exploded, one after another, and came near burning me in two in the middle. No more of that for me, thank you."

"Haven't you just a little one somewhere? Feel in all your pockets."

"Not a single one. Hold on now; I might have a yard or so of sheet lightning." Here he examined all his pockets again, and even turned them inside out.

"Well, I do declare!" he said; "I haven't any of that, either. I usually take a bit of it along, and sometimes use it for a necktie or a handkerchief. Pretty color, and quite

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harmless. Occasionally I am troubled with a sore back. Then I rip off a piece of sheet lightning, rub it with my hands till it glows, and clap it over the lame place. Beats a mustard plaster all hollow."

During the conversation Mr. Comet had been showing signs of restlessness. So Stella said, "Don't you think we better start ahead, Mr. Comet? Perhaps Jupiter will go with us."

"No, my way is in the other direction," said Jupiter. "I was just taking a climb for exercise when I heard your yells. Am mighty pleased I got here in time. Now I'm going down to see Neptune a minute. Good-bye." And Jupiter strode down the hill.

CHAPTER IX

ILL-TEMPERED MR. MOON

“**W**E must move along as fast as we can,” remarked Mr. Comet when the little party once more took up the march. “If we reach the caves soon, we can talk to Mr. Moon before he goes in, and then see Mrs. Sun just as she comes out. That is why I walked so fast a while ago. They seldom are visible at the same time, and if we do not arrive as they change watches we can see only one, unless we wait twelve hours or so.”

“Let’s hurry, then!” cried Stella. “Is it far from here?”

“The distance is not so great, but it’s a stiff climb up,—a mile higher than where we now are, I should say. “Look!” and

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Mr. Comet pointed towards the mountain-tops. "Do you see that red light, with the white one near it, on the very edge of the peak off there? The red is right over Mrs. Sun's front door, and the other is over Mr. Moon's."

There was no difficulty in locating the objects to which Mr. Comet referred. While every point on the whole range glittered and twinkled, there were in the direction indicated two gems of light, sparkling like a ruby and a diamond, and so large and splendid as easily to be distinguished from all the others. These marked the underground dwellings of Mrs. Sun and Mr. Moon.

"This trail is well travelled because it's the only one over the mountains for hundreds of miles," continued Mr. Comet, still stepping briskly along; "we're sure to meet a few of my friends. I suppose I'll have to

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pass the time of night with them, and be civil, but we need n't be hindered much."

Aquarius now drew closer to Mr. Comet and began to talk to him in a serious way. As Stella and Roidy trudged together, close behind them, she could not help overhearing much that was said. The water-bearer seemed to think it would be safer to change their plans, and not to visit the Sun and Moon at all. He thought they were not proper persons for Stella to meet. Mr. Moon, he had been informed, got full once a month, regularly; they might find him in a shocking condition; there must be something wrong with Mrs. Sun, also, for she did not spend her time with her husband, as a married woman should. It did not seem right to him that Mr. Moon should be up all night and remain in his cave all day, while his wife wandered around alone every day, and kept in her cave at night.

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Mr. Comet, on the other hand, contended that the right way to tour is to see all parts of a country and all classes of people. Admitting that a child should be guarded from evil, he said that it should be remembered that the sight of a living example once in a while is a good object-lesson, and serves as a warning.

He insisted, too, that Aquarius based his statements on mere rumors. This idle gossip might be entirely false. In his opinion it is just as easy to believe good of people as bad, and a much better habit.

So they argued, earnestly but good-naturedly. Stella was very anxious to call on the Sun and Moon, and saw with disappointment that Mr. Comet seemed to be wavering. Thus she was glad when further discussion was interrupted by wild cries of "Stop! Stop! Stop thief!!" These shouts were repeated over and over with such

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energy and force that all halted at once to learn the cause of the disturbance.

This was not hard to find. In the road, some distance behind them, they could discern the figure of a man coming towards them at top speed. With every bound he gave forth a yell like those which had just attracted their attention. As he approached, he plainly showed every mark of excitement and anger. The shepherd's crook, held aloft in his right hand, he brandished savagely, and with his left he swung in circles the skin of an enormous lion, like a signal of distress. A sword, loosely fastened to a belt around his waist, flapped against his legs and more than once almost tripped him.

When he caught up with them he dropped his crook, drew his sword, and without even waiting to recover from his exertion, he seemed prepared to attack Mr. Comet and Aquarius. Roidy sprang nimbly behind a

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rock, and motioned to Stella to do likewise; but Sirius, bending and twisting his body till it almost broke in two, greeted the new arrival with all the signs of affection a dumb brute can show.

“What now, Orion?” cried Aquarius, at the same time bringing his jar around in front of him as though for a shield. “Are you blind and crazy, that you threaten two old friends? If aught has been stolen from you, we will be the first to help you to detect and punish the miscreant. Am I not right, Mr. Comet?”

“Yes, indeed!” said Mr. Comet; “but if Orion deliberately has set out to insult me, I demand satisfaction here and now, if I can but borrow a sword somewhere. Such a charge against me, his favorite son, will bring my old father’s gray tail in sorrow to the grave.”

A look of astonishment came over the

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face of Orion. The sword and the lion's skin slipped to the sky beside him; and he reached out one hand to Aquarius and the other to Mr. Comet.

"What can this mean?" he exclaimed. "You *two* certainly are not thieves. That little Asteroid hiding there would do nothing really wicked; and this girl, who looks as though she is about to cry, would not be found in bad company."

"Perhaps an explanation from you would be in order," replied Mr. Comet. "We have not the least idea what all this row is about."

"It's simple enough," Orion proceeded. "Early this evening I started out for my usual hunt, and at once missed my faithful dog, Sirius, who has followed me for years and years, as you know. I could not find him anywhere, and made up my mind that the lion, Leo, must have killed him at last."

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Down near the ford I chanced to meet Castor and Pollux. They told me they had passed four vagabonds taking my dog along with them, and gave me the direction in which you had departed. I hurried along, and when, afar off, I saw you with the dog accompanying you, I thought I must do battle with a set of bandits."

"Let me tell you how it is," Stella interrupted. "I've just longed to play with Sirius lots and lots of times. To-night he barked at me, and when I came up to call on Mr. Comet he ran over to see me. He's as cute as he can be, but you can take him now if you want to. Won't you trade him for our Hector?"

"Not much; but as long as it's all right you can keep him with you to-night. When you are through with him point your finger at him and say, 'Home, Sirius, home!' and he'll find me again. Now I must go back.

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I'm far away from my customary hunting-grounds. Farewell—all of you. Just wait till I catch those Gemini.” And without waiting for another word Orion left them.

Again the ascent of the mountain was commenced. As they climbed side by side, Roidy pointed out to Stella many strange animals with which this part of the sky seemed to abound. Scorpio, the scorpion, lay extended at full length on the slope below them. His big claws and long feelers quivered in the air, and when Roidy threw a piece of sky at him he raised his tail, armed with its deadly sting, as if to defend himself. Stella was glad indeed that he was no nearer. This was her feeling, also, when Draco, the dragon, thrust out his horned head from a crevice above them.

A little farther along Aries, the ram, barred the road, as though he would dispute their right to advance; but a shout from Aquarius

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caused him to jump to one side. Poised on the very top of a lofty crag, Corvus, the crow, spread out his wings as if prepared for flight; next, just above them, soared Aquila, the eagle, carrying the boy Antinous grasped in his talons.

At the sight of a lad in such apparent peril, Stella cried out in dismay. Roidy, however, calmed her by saying that Antinous had ridden in this way so long that he enjoyed it, and was even too stingy to give any one else a chance. When the eagle was directly over them, Roidy, to prove this, called up: "Hello, Anty; how's tricks? Come on down and let me try it a while." To this Antinous made no reply except to wave his hand and smile, as he was borne out of sight around a projecting headland.

Along the highway, too, passed an almost steady stream of people. Some of them Stella recognized at once, and the names of the others were told her by her companions.

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She cannot remember them all; and some were so horrid she wishes she could forget them. There was Serpentarius, holding in his outstretched hands the body of a serpent; Bootes, the herdsman, his body bare save for a half blanket tied around his waist; and Centaurus, part man, part horse, and except for the lack of wings so much like Sagittarius that at first Stella thought the archer had come back to them. Lupus, the gaunt wolf, followed him.

With a shudder Stella speaks of two especially, who rushed by so close to her that she could have touched them. One of these was Perseus, half clad, carrying aloft in his left hand a glittering sword, while from his right there hung a human head covered with wriggling snakes instead of hair; the other, Hercules, was armed with a mighty club, and gripped in one hand what looked like three freshly severed dog's-heads.

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Stella did not care to travel a road crowded with such people; and she was pleased when Mr. Comet now told her they probably would not see many more, as it was almost morning. The next instant he cried out: "Why, there's my stubborn friend, Auriga, the wagoner! I simply must stop a moment."

Stella now beheld an open wagon by the side of the trail. In it was kneeling a man with a look of determination on his face, as though his mind were fixed on some definite purpose.

"How d'y', 'Riga?" called Roidy. "What are you squatting there for? Think you're in an auto?"

"It ill becomes me, my good friend," recited Aquarius in his sing-song way, "to advise one who so evidently knows his own business; but perchance you will not take it amiss if I suggest that you would arrive sooner at your destination if you would get out and push."

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"Neither your jeers nor your advice move me at all," replied Auriga. "See, this wagon is stoutly and handsomely built, with rubber tires and double springs. It is meant for use. There is a pole, also, which shows that two steeds should pull it. Until these are provided me, here I remain. That much is settled."

"And you won't have to stay long, either," shouted Stella, excitedly. "Those noses coming around the bend there must belong to two horses."

"You are mistaken," answered Auriga. "They are simply fragments. Neither is any more good than a hole without a cookie around it. Look for yourself, now."

Beyond question he was right. As the objects came into full view they proved to be but parts of horses. One had head, neck, shoulders with long wings attached, and front legs; the other was a head and neck only.

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After her experience with Taurus, Stella was not much surprised at the one with legs; but to see a horse's head and neck moving around at the proper distance above the sky, and with no support at all, astounded her greatly.

"What do you think of that, now?" asked Auriga; "I have knelt here and pondered for centuries, but I can see no sense in it. Here I am, waiting for something to drag my chariot; and there, instead of even one whole horse, are two portions, each absolutely worthless. You would at least think that Equuleus, the one without legs, would have the wings; but on the contrary, these are given to Pegasus, who has legs also. Is there any justice in it?"

"It does seem funny," Stella remarked; "but I'll tell you what you do. Put shafts in your wagon instead of a pole, and hitch them up tandem, one in front of the

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other. Equuleus will look fine floating along in front as the leader; and Pegasus, with front feet and wings, ought to pull as much as if he had four feet. The hind-half of a horse isn't much use, anyway, except to kick up, or to switch its tail over the lines."

"Not to be thought of!" insisted Auriga, firmly. "I'm going to have two complete animals. No scraps for me, and that ends it. Nor have I told you the worst of it," he continued. "Look at Sagittarius, will you, and Centaurus. Did you ever see a finer horse's body than each of them possesses? So there are two good bodies spoiled by having men stuck on to them, and here are two perfect heads, useless because there is nothing else to them. It's enough to set me wild. Why, back there in the sky is as superb a bunch of red hair as you ever set eyes on. Coma Berenice's, they call it. I'm

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actually in love with it; but there's not a sign of a woman's body anywhere. What's the use of a lone, red scalp, anyway? Talk about your 'pigs in clover' puzzles! These sky freaks beat them all."

Here Mr. Comet seemed about to try to offer some explanation; but, if so, he changed his mind, for he said only: "You are not the first one who has found things in the heavens or on earth which he could not understand. But we must be going. If steadfastness of purpose counts, you will win yet. Farewell."

Just after they had started, Mr. Comet ran back and appeared to ask Auriga a question. When he had caught up with them again he said:

"I was trying to find out if Saturn has been around here. He tells me the old man is in jail; so I can't show you his rings this trip."

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“Whatever is the matter?” asked Stella.

“Of course you know about the beautiful rings he owns. Your astronomers, I believe, always are admiring them. Well, he ran short of money, and pawned them to Cepheus. It seems he represented them to be solid gold. One turned out to be only brass; and when he could not repay what he had borrowed, he was imprisoned for cheating. I'm very sorry for him, and shall try to bail him out a little later.”

During the rest of the journey the road was deserted, save by themselves. The ascent was steep, and the trail zigzagged back and forth along the mountain-side. Stella kept her eyes fixed on the sky beneath her. It was necessary for her to exert all her strength, and to take each step deliberately and firmly. Still, she is such a plucky and sturdy little girl that she had no idea of giving up, and even now will not admit to me she was very

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tired. But she does say that she never before worked so hard, and that she was glad when she reached a level space again and heard Mr. Comet call out, "Here we are, at last!"

The place where they now stood was smooth as a floor, and perhaps as deep as the ordinary yard. It was hemmed in between the slope up which they had just climbed, and the cliffs, which rose a few hundred feet higher and formed the backbone of the range. Right in front of her Stella saw the ruby and the diamond she so often had gazed at from a distance. Below these were two openings which she knew must be the mouths of the caves mentioned by Mr. Comet; and near-by the figure of a man was pacing nervously up and down. This was Mr. Moon.

As soon as Sirius beheld him he elevated his nose in the air, and gave utterance to

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a series of prolonged and plaintive howls. Words could not stop him, and he ceased only when Roidy grabbed him by the neck and shook him. Even then he kept whining and growling to show that he would continue his serenade at the first possible opportunity.

Upon hearing this racket Mr. Moon turned towards them and asked crossly, "What does all this mean, anyway? I can't stick my head outside my cave but every dog and pup, from one rim of the earth to the other, yells and yowls at me. Big and little, fat and slim, old and young, in bass and tenor, soprano and alto, they all get after me. It's not surprising I have no nerves left. And now you haul Sirius up to my very door to annoy me further."

"Pardon me, my good Mr. Moon," said Mr. Comet, soothingly; "we will keep Sirius quiet while here, and take him with us when



Unhappy Mr. Moon

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we go. I am showing my little earth-friend, Stella, about the sky, and I could not help bringing her here to see the most glorious orb in all the heavens."

This flattery seemed to mollify the moon a little, but his voice was grumbling as he spoke again. "It's a wonder that you remember me at all. Seldom do any of you folks come near me in my sickness. One of these years I shall be gone for good. Then some may be sorry they have not treated me better."

Mr. Moon's appearance showed that he really must be ill. Never had Stella looked on one so wan and pale. His face was thin and gaunt, also. In the centre it was sunken, like a dish. At the top the forehead stuck out sharply, and below, the narrow chin ran up into a point. Viewed from one side it looked not at all unlike the disk that in the early hours of the morn-

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ing you yourself may have seen, low-hanging in the eastern sky.

"I am sorry you are not well," remarked Mr. Comet; "but you should not become downhearted. Keep up your spirits."

"Keep up my spirits, you say!" whined Mr. Moon. "Can't you see that I'm on my last quarter? A man can't be jolly in such a fix. Couldn't lend me a half, could you?"

Mr. Comet shook his head.

"Of course not!" snarled the Moon. "Pestered by a hot, noisy wife; deserted by my friends; howled at by the dogs; raved at by poets; tormented by the woes of broken-hearted lovers; what is there left for me, anyway?"

"But you must keep good-natured," said Stella. "Mamma says we've always something for which to be grateful."

"What have I to be thankful for?"

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asked Mr. Moon, sourly. "Tell me that, please."

"Well, perhaps because you're not made of green cheese."

"Who says I'm made of such stuff? It's a base lie. Every one slanders me. Now, if it were nice, yellow cream cheese, that goes with mince pie on Thanksgiving Day, I wouldn't care so much. But I'm dyspeptic and can't eat pie." And Mr. Moon groaned dismally.

"Do you think you take good care of yourself?" inquired Aquarius. "I try to be charitable towards the opinions of others, although, as my occupation shows, I am a cold water temperance man; yet it does seem to me that to spend one-half of every month getting full, and the other half recovering from it, is not a proper life."

"That's another falsehood. I'd like to

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find out who started it. My wife, Mrs. Sun, has heard it; and though she pretends to be good to me I know she more than half believes it. The truth is I haven't taken a drink of anything stronger than milk or water in all my life. The only safe rule for stars as well as men is never to taste wine, beer, or anything of the kind."

"I'm sure you're a good man," said Stella; "and I'm sorry you're abused so much."

"That's a good girl," whimpered Mr. Moon. "It's so sweet to find some one who will sympathize with me. Now I'll tell you what's wrong. I'm afflicted with every swelling disease on the calendar. Once a month I'm stricken, and as soon as I get over one thing I catch another. If it isn't dropsy it's mumps; and if it isn't mumps it's toothache. I reckon I've had mumps and toothache more times than all the boys

ILL-TEMPERED MR. MOON

and girls in the world put together. And when my face puffs up, folks say I'm full."

"It is too bad," remarked Stella. "When I get back home I'll tell everybody that you don't drink at all. And isn't there something else I can do for you?"

"A thousand."

"But I couldn't remember so many. Tell me just one."

"Well, you say to the boys and men down there where you live that I'm disgusted with having to hear all about their sweethearts. Why should they pick *me* out and fire all their troubles at me? But they do. Adam commenced it, telling me how much he loved Eve; and since that time every man — black, white, red, yellow, and speckled — who ever lived has smiled and sighed and groaned and cried at me because of some woman or other. Do you won-

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der I'm all worn out, listening to their nonsense?"

"No, indeed; I never thought of it that way, but it does seem ridiculous."

"Now hearken again. When you get back, you commence this reform right at home. Not a week ago a boy not old enough to wear long trousers stood out on his front porch and told me he did n't care to live any more, because Stella was cruel to him."

"Why, is n't that funny!" said Stella. "It must have been Ned, the night after dancing-school. He wanted to take me home, but papa came for me. I didn't think Ned cared, though;" and Stella looked not at all displeased. "Tell me just exactly what words he used."

Mr. Moon opened his mouth to reply, but went no farther. At this instant sounds as though from some one singing in a high-pitched voice issued from the Sun's cave.

ILL-TEMPERED MR. MOON

“Look out!” shrieked the Moon. “There comes my wife. I simply can’t stand her songs and laughter when I’m in this nervous condition.” And he dove into his cave like a rabbit into its burrow.

CHAPTER X

GOOD-NATURED MRS. SUN—HOME AGAIN

MRS. SUN *was* coming. To judge by the sound, there could be no doubt about that. Each instant the turmoil increased. Her voice echoed and re-echoed from one side of the cave to the other. What she was singing could not be distinguished; but one could see that she was in a pleasant frame of mind, and was not at all afraid of sharing her happiness with others.

All at once, so suddenly that Stella gave a little jump, out bobbed Mrs. Sun herself, very much after the manner of a Jack-in-the-box. Without noticing that she had company, she hurried to the opening into which Mr. Moon had just disappeared. Thrusting

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her head inside, she continued to pour forth her song, at first loudly, and then more and more softly, till finally the notes ceased entirely. After a few moments of silence she turned about, and with her arms resting akimbo above her hips, she gazed wistfully into the distance.

Mrs. Sun was a sight to behold. She herself and everything on her was red, and the reddest kind of red. It looked as though it would burn you if you but touched it anywhere with the tip of your finger. Her large head was exactly round—a perfect circle. From this her red hair, long and wavy, streamed in every way imaginable. It stuck up and out and sideways. It hung around her ears, under her chin, and down over her breast. In fact, a ring, drawn in crimson ink, with straight lines radiating from it in all directions, is a very fair picture of the head and hair of Mrs. Sun, as

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Stella saw them. Her face was the same color as her hair, and the gown the same as her face. It was hard to tell where the one ended and the other began.

The dress was a Mother Hubbard, somewhat worn and frayed, with full skirt, sleeves, and bodice, and belted loosely about the waist. It continually was flopping and flouncing up and down, in and out, as flames hover around a bonfire. Such a human torch Stella never before had met. Involuntarily she placed her hand before her face as if to shield it from the heat, and drew closer to the water-bucket of Aquarius.

While Stella had been making this examination, Mrs. Sun had been recovering from her exertion. Now she withdrew her gaze from the horizon and let it slowly wander over objects nearer her. Soon her eyes rested on Mr. Comet and the others. In-



Smiling Mrs. Sun appears

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stantly she came forward with a beaming smile which left no doubt of her kindly welcome.

“How glad I am to see you!” she called out. “Have you noticed my dear husband around anywhere?”

“We have had quite a chat with him,” answered Mr. Comet. “A few moments ago he retired into his apartment. The poor man does not appear to be in the best of health.”

“That’s true,” said Mrs. Sun. “Ever since I can remember he has been ailing. He seems a little worse of late, too, since some one started the report that he is tipsy when he gets full. It bothers him all the time to be talked about in such a way. I tell him not to mind. It’s what we are, not what people say we are, that counts. But he can’t look at it as I do. This ought to be a warning to all of us not to

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gossip. There are three times when we should not speak ill of people,—when it isn't true; when we don't know positively whether or not it's true; and when it is true. There's enough good in every one without talking about the bad. What do you think of my philosophy, Aquarius?"

"In fitting words you have given voice to a sentiment I long have entertained," replied the water-bearer, entirely forgetting his argument with Mr. Comet. "But why is it you and your husband do not associate more together?"

"It is too bad," remarked Mrs. Sun; "but it can't be helped. His sickness has worn on his nerves so that he stays up all night because he can't sleep, and that is the time I must rest, as I am at work all day. Sometimes I see him for a few moments, just at evening or in the early morning. I really wish I could comfort him more."

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“And how is your health?” asked Stella, who had been listening intently. She thought Mrs. Sun a very dear woman, indeed, for all her queer appearance.

“Oh, I’m all right. To be sure, I have a bit of a fever. Suppose it’s because I have to go across the sky every day, no matter what the weather; and I never have a vacation. I smile all the time, though; and one can’t get down sick when one keeps happy. I really think I am getting better.”

“Perhaps that’s what my books mean when they say you’re growing cooler all the time,” Stella suggested.

“We’ll soon see,” cried Mrs. Sun. “I’ll use my thermometer.” Here she picked up from the sky a tube as long as a clothes-pole, and with the agility of a sword-swallower stuck it down her throat. There she held it, and Stella saw a little white line in the

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centre rise rapidly towards the end way up in the air.

After about five minutes Mrs. Sun removed the instrument and handed it to Stella. "What does it say?" she asked.

"Why, it's marked like a tape-measure! I can't find any figures for degrees."

"Degrees! Do you think I can measure my heat in that way? A common thermometer would melt in my mouth like a stick of candy in yours. Tell me what it reads."

"Nine feet, seven inches."

"I thought so. That's one inch cooler than I was five hundred years ago. Just tell your teacher so, will you?"

"Yes, indeed. And did you always have to work so hard?" Now Stella was beginning to feel sorry for Mrs. Sun.

"I've had to go across the sky once a day ever since I can remember; but it wasn't so

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bad when I was rich. Instead of these caves we formerly had a grand mansion. This is how the papers spoke of it in the society notes: —

‘The sun’s bright palace, on high columns raised,
With burnished gold and flaming jewels blazed,
The folding gates diffused a silver light,
And with a milder gleam refreshed the sight.’

“What do you think of that?”

“Perfectly lovely! Tell me more, please.”

“Not about the house. That’s enough. But I had a chariot to ride in; horses to draw it; a maid, Aurora, to open the door for me; and once we even hired a driver, Phaeton. Ever hear of him?”

“Why, he was the boy the Sun-horses ran away with, wasn’t he? And he most burned the earth all up. Then Jupiter hit him with a thunder-bolt, same as he killed Hydra for me.”

“He’s the one. I didn’t know what be-

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came of him. I'm sorry if Jupiter killed him. He didn't mean any harm."

"But with Mr. Moon's sickness our trouble commenced," continued Mrs. Sun. "We kept growing poorer and poorer. First I discharged Aurora. Then I sold one horse and drove the other; sold the chariot and rode horseback; sold the last horse and walked; and sold the house, to live in a hole in the sky. But I have my husband left, and what's the use grumbling? It's just as easy to laugh as to cry, and makes you feel lots better."

"I think you're perfectly grand!" cried Stella. "But don't you find it hard to work so every day,—Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, and all?"

"It is hard. I'll not deny that. But every one has a duty to perform, and it can best be done with a smiling face. What hurts me most is that boys and girls down

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on the earth fret and scold when rainy days come, just as if it's my fault. Remember next time, please, that Mrs. Sun, with her sleeves rolled up, is here behind the clouds, doing her very best to shine through. And I always do win in the end, don't I?"

"Of course you do; and I'll tell all about you when I get back. But wouldn't it be nice if you had a big red automobile to ride in?"

"Fine! I never thought of that. What do they cost?"

"I don't know; but a whole lot, I expect."

"Well, I'm going to save every penny I can, and see if I can't buy one. It's exactly what I need. What's the best, steam or gasoline?"

"A woman as fiery as she is wouldn't last long over a tank of gasoline," whispered Aquarius to Mr. Comet.

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“What were you saying? I didn't quite understand you.”

“A woman as sweet and gentle as you are should have whatever she may desire,” droned Aquarius, his face, as always, expressionless.

“Well, it didn't sound like that,” said Mrs. Sun. “But you wouldn't speak anything bad of me, I'm sure. Now I must begin my tramp. There come the clouds, too. My raincoat's all worn out, and I've lost one of my rubbers. I'll have to pin up my skirts and take off my shoes and stockings. Isn't that funny?”

While Mrs. Sun thus prepared herself for her journey, Stella looked down the mountain-side and off towards the horizon. She could not detect the slightest sign of a change in the atmosphere. The outline of every hill and crag and canyon, and the shades of blue and green and purple, were as plainly marked as ever.

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"I don't believe it's going to be bad at all," said she. "Aren't you mistaken, Mrs. Sun?"

"Never a bit," answered Mrs. Sun. "I've watched the opening of too many days not to know what's what. The air is a trifle damp; makes the ends of my hair droop. And there's a hazy spot way over there that means mischief. Climb up by the lights where you can see all around better."

"Come on, Roidy!" cried Stella; and the children, taking Sirius with them, scrambled up to the very top of the ledge. The ascent was too severe for Mr. Comet and Aquarius, who came about half-way and stopped; but Stella in her eagerness found a point above all the rest, and only large enough for her alone. On this she placed herself in great glee, because she had outstripped Roidy and had mounted higher than he.

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From her vantage ground the view was as perfect as though she were in a captive balloon. The whole circle of the horizon was before her, with absolutely nothing to obstruct the sight. Turning slowly around, she looked in every direction; and this complete picture of the whole sky she is sure she always will remember, just as she saw it then.

The grand panorama lasted but a moment. Almost immediately she observed what seemed a grayish haze around the outer edge of her field of vision. While she peered intently, to make sure, it rapidly became more and more pronounced. Then she chanced to glance up at the black vault overhead. To her surprise it had assumed a leaden hue. When again she surveyed the sky there were vast billows of mist where before the haze could but faintly be descried.

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So the clouds gathered, faster than she ever knew them to assemble before. Out of plains and canyons, hills and mountains, the whitish films arose. From above, downward; from without, inward; from below, upward; swiftly, silently, steadily they came. The point whereon she stood was the very centre around which these ghostly vapors grouped themselves; and ere Stella had time even to wave her hand or to smile farewell, once more she was wrapped from head to foot.

For a second Roidy's red cap glowed like a lighted cigar through its ashes; she heard the dripping of the water from Aquarius' urn, and a low whine from Sirius. If Mr. Comet called a message, it did not reach her. The last thing she saw was the smiling face of Mrs. Sun, — a blood-red disk that seemed strangely familiar. Then there was nothing but the dim, dull darkness of the fog.

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“Well,” said Stella, “if all this goes as quickly as it came, it won’t last long. I must stand still, or I’ll fall off this steeple I’m on. Why, it’s getting so thick I can lean against it. My, but it’s soft as a feather bed! Now that there is no one near, I *am* just a little tired. Guess I’ll take a nap till it clears up.”

So Stella rested herself upon the clouds. As was the case when, early in the evening she sat in her big chair, she might have gone to sleep had not something, just as she began to doze, aroused her; but this time, instead of the barking of the dog-star, it was a swishing, creaking sound, as the whole mass in which she lay began to swing and turn and twist.

“I’m sailing right off the mountain-top,” she shouted, “and away from Mr. Comet!”

Fiercely she dug with her hands and kicked with her feet, in hopes that she

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might touch some peak to which she could cling, but in vain. The motion now became so regular and gentle that she closed her eyes. Did child ever have a softer couch on which to lie? No wonder that she did not fear for the future, but instead, lived over the events of the strange night just passed.

Again Mr. Comet sat asleep in the silver chair of Cassiopeia; Mars described the fighting of the football game; Sagittarius and Aquarius disputed over Taurus; Venus taught the Nebulae about bees and pigpens; Mercury thanked her for the safety-pins; Neptune asked her to be sure and not forget the papers; and Jupiter hurled his lightning at the proper time to save her from the fangs of Hydra.

So real was this vision of the thunderbolt that she cried out aloud and opened her eyes. While so doing, she struck with

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a decided thud against something, and found herself sitting on what could be neither mist or sky. Surely it was not her chair?

But it *was* the chair, placed in the corner of her room, right where she had left it. To satisfy herself, she felt of the arms and back. There could be no mistake. Bewildered, she stared around the room. It was broad daylight, and everything could be seen, exactly as it should be. The white spread on her bed was tucked in neatly at the sides and bottom. No one could have slept there. She gazed towards the west and north. The fleecy fog of early morning was rising from the earth. Then with a start she looked out through the tiny east window. Mrs. Sun, a crimson ball, was beginning her daily walk across the heavens.

"Good luck and a pleasant journey!" shouted Stella; and did the sun really nod in reply, or was it her imagination?

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“Why, I never thought I’d light here,” she mused. “It’s plain how I was carried up, and how I was brought back. That’s easy. But how the clouds shot me right through that open window into this very chair, without even bumping my head, is more than I ever shall understand. No; I sha’n’t let papa know where I went, nor Jack. They’d laugh at me. But I’ll trust mamma and that writing man across the way, who’s always so good to me. Wonder when I’ll go visiting again. It’s such fun. Don’t suppose to-night; but I know I shall some time. Now I must get ready for breakfast.”

In this way Stella returned to earth from her wonderful journey to the sky. I am glad indeed that she trusted me enough to describe her trip to me; and you must be pleased also, because if she had not let me know I could not have written it all out for you.

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Do you think one of these nights she will go up again and re-visit Mr. Comet and her other friends? Likely she will; and one thing, at least, is certain,—if she does she will talk it over with me afterwards. In that case, do you not want me to tell you about it, too?

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